

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1887.—VOL. LXXIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 1, 1890.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"I KNOW YOU LOVE FLOWERS!" LORD BRAMSGROVE WOULD—OFTEN SAY TO NINA.

NINA.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was Nina! Yes, it was Nina—Nina's long velvety brown eyes, liquid and saucy in turn, at the moment made them; Nina's rosebud mouth, with its lips ever inviting kisses; they were so full and fresh; Nina's— And then I laid the portrait down, and wondered in all the years which had passed since it came into my possession, how I had never till now looked at it as I did then.

It was painted on ivory, which made the soft smooth cheek look no softer than the original was when first I saw her, now eighteen years ago. It was one night—ugh! I shiver when I think of it—that she came to me covered from head to foot with the snowflakes, which

were driven by the wind, howling like a host of demons within the door as I opened it to let her in.

"Take care of it, nurse," she said, trembling from head to foot, just as though it was a dog or a kitten she was giving into my charge; and then she placed in my arms a bundle wrapped up in a shawl, and when I opened it,

"Sakes alive!" I ejaculated, "it's a baby!"

A baby with almond eyes, just like hers, and a tiny mouth which smiled at me, as though to say, "Do love me, there's no one else."

"Lor, m'lss," I said once more, "what does it all mean?" But she only burst into tears, crying as though her heart would break; and I sat cuddling the little one, saying nothing, until she should quiet down a bit, and tell me, her old nurse, all about it.

But, when she became calmer, instead of enlightening me in any way, she only arose from the seat she had taken opposite the one where I still remained nursing the baby, saying she must go; and when I was about to give her the

infant, a little nettled at being told nothing, she drew back.

"No, no, nurse," she said, "for my sake take her. Bring her up as your own, and never tell her who—but there, I know you won't" she added, passing a roll of bank-notes into my hand; and before I had got over my astonishment she was gone, out into the bitter, biting cold, the blinding snow; and although, after laying the child on my bed, I went out too, to endeavour to find her, and bring her back, I could see nothing, my voice alone returning to me on the wind, which shrieked and yelled with new fury.

And that was the last I saw of my young lady to whom I had been nurse since she was five years old. I was a young woman then, though my hair was not as it is now, with streaks of white all amongst the black, and very little of the latter; but notwithstanding that many a year has passed since I and John Mathews, a small tenant-farmer, had become man and wife, we had no living children, and when I went back into my cottage, and looked on the infant sleep-

ing as I had left it on my bed, it seemed as if Providence had given us back the little girl we had laid to rest ten years since in the quiet churchyard, when Miss Helen brought me one of the handsomest wreaths ever seen—all beautiful white flowers from the Brocksley Hall conservatory—to lay on our darling's grave.

So I told John all about it when he came in later on, and I led him to where the little one lay; and I knew, when I looked on his kind face, and saw the tears start to his eyes, that he was thinking just as I had done but a few moments before.

"What shall we call her, dear?" I asked, the first idea I had had of naming her Helen Brocksley, after my young lady, passing away as rapidly as it had entered into my mind; for it seemed too much like an insult, I thought, to her. So turning to where my husband still stood watching the sleeping babe,—

"Shall it be Nina?" I said.

And then he stooped and kissed me, drawing me within his strong arms, all covered with snow and cold as he was.

"Nina—our Nina!" he answered, touching the child with his icy lips, which made it draw its pretty little face all ways; and it would have cried had I not pushed him aside and cuddled it to sleep again.

And so we named her Nina. That was what Miss Helen called ours when she begged of her mother, Lady Brocksley, to let her stand godmother to her, and I knew she loved the name as much as I did.

Of course, John and I talked much about it all that evening, he almost fearing that our treasure—and we were as much pleased with it as children with a new toy—would be taken from us the following day.

But neither the next, nor for many days after did we hear anything. There are always those in small places who know one's business, and can manage it, they fancy, far better than they can their own; and so we did not wonder, before a week had passed, to find that everyone in the village knew that a child had been left in our care, with many surmises—some near, it may be, some as far off as possible from the truth as to whose it was.

But so occupied were we, John and I, with our own affairs that we heard little ourselves; so that I was entirely taken by surprise one morning in early March to receive a visit from Lady Brocksley.

A tall, fine woman she was, her ladyship, not my Miss Helen's mother, but a Spanish girl, they said, whom Sir Charles had married but one short year after the death of my own lady. But Spanish or French, all I knew was that she was a foreigner with hair black as jet, and eyes which seemed to read into your very soul.

"Good morning, Mrs. Mathews!" she said, walking in when I opened the door, with a stately, elastic kind of step she always had. "May I sit down a moment?"

"Certainly, my lady," I replied, dusting a chair as I placed it for her. "I wonder your ladyship should care to venture out, such a bliter east wind as it is this morning!"

"It is cold," she answered, shivering in her furs, "but I wanted to speak to you on an important subject, and I am so tied by the visitors staying at the Hall that I was quite glad to be able to steal out alone and unobserved for a few moments," and she gave a weary sort of sigh, adding, whilst looking round our humble home, "You seem so comfortable here—I quite envy you."

"Envy me, my lady!" I ejaculated, remembering the while the splendour up at the big house.

"Well, you are your own mistress," she continued, noticing the astonishment on my face, "whilst in my position one becomes a slave to society;" and she placed her tiny feet close to the fire.

"I have come to speak to you of Miss Helen," she continued, after a moment or two, during which she seemed studying the burning coals. "I suppose you know she has left the Hall?" And then she raised those searching eyes of hers to my face.

I knew I turned very red, for I felt my cheeks burn with the hot blood rising to my temples. Of course I knew of Miss Helen's flight; it was in everyone's mouth, with a lot of scandal which I would not believe.

"I did hear of it, my lady," I answered; and just then the baby awoke, and began to scream.

"Good gracious! What is that?" her ladyship asked. "I did not know you had any children, Mrs. Mathews."

"No, my lady, nor have I," I replied; "the little one belongs to a neighbour, who asked me to mind it a bit." But although I spoke quite quietly, my lady knew I was telling a lie, and I saw it.

"I won't keep you from your charge," she said, rising, and fastening her gloves, which she had taken off. "I thought you would like to know—though I am almost ashamed to speak of the disgrace of the whole story—that in case she should come to you, her old nurse, if she has not been already, to tell her that her father, Sir Charles, is ill with the shame and scandal she has brought upon the family."

What a stress she laid on the "if," and the baby crying all the time, that I was quite glad when, at last, she went out.

She always hated my young lady, and, notwithstanding all she said, I knew she was right glad that she was gone.

The next day the carrier brought a large box, directed to me in a strange hand, and the carriage paid, containing a complete wardrobe for the infant Nina, and no clue further than the portrait, which from that day to this, now eighteen years ago, I have never, till now, removed from the spot where I placed it, in a cedar box which held a baby's coral necklace and some silver bells.

Eighteen years, I thought; how time flies! And then I became aware of a shadow between me and the light which came through the window, where the roses and fuchsias bloomed during the summer months; so, with a start, like as if I were a guilty creature, I hid the picture in my bosom, and looked up to see two saucy laughing eyes peering at me from between the branches of a giant geranium, which was trained till it covered the panes like a blind.

The next moment, Nina, our Nina, threw her arms round my neck and smothered me with kisses, whilst her breath came to me like the scent of new-mown hay.

CHAPTER II.

"Is tea ready, you dear old mother?" she asked; "father will be in directly;" and then I remembered I had put no kettle on, and I saw John coming from the field, where the reapers were cutting down the golden corn, waving as it did beneath the sickle, and the dull, green trees in the distance seeming to touch the light blue of the autumn sky.

"All right, child!" I answered, forgetting for the moment the picture I had hidden away in my bosom, only thinking how beautiful she was, with the rose-colour on her cheek, and the bright red poppies she had placed in the coils of her black hair.

So she put on her hat again, which she had placed on the table, the cornflowers yellow, scarlet, and blue, amid its trimmings, and ran into the garden, returning shortly with a dish of raspberries, each as big as a mulberry, laid temptingly on fresh green leaves.

John had come in then, and we all sat round the table, on which I had spread a damask cloth, white as the driven snow, with butter made from my own dairy, and a jug of cream you could almost cut with a knife, it was so thick and yellow.

"The harvest will soon be in now, mother!" he said, while eating some bread I had just taken from the oven, "and I only hope the rain will keep off till the last sheaf is stored."

"I see no fear to the contrary," I answered, turning my head to where the barometer marked "Set Fair," as I did so noting two gentlemen

on horseback pass our gate, in the dusty road which ran before it. "Why, that's Sir Charles, isn't it?" I asked, and John jumped up and went to the window.

"That's him, safe enough, and young Lord Bramsgrove with him," he answered.

"Lord Bramsgrove!" I ejaculated; "he here again!" for it occurred to my mind a story which had been told, when he stayed at the Hall, now two years since, and when he left, May Thorne, the prettiest girl in the village, went too, no one knew where. No one knew more than that she had gone, leaving not a word behind her, only a broken-hearted mother, who was laid in her grave but a short month after.

"I don't believe for a moment his lordship had anything whatever to do with the girl's disappearance," John said, reading my thoughts, thinking this while how he would have felt had it been our Nina instead of the other.

And then, she pressing us, we told her the gossip which was in everyone's mouth at the time.

"I don't believe it, either," she said, the colour flying all over her face, and dyeing it to her temples with scarlet. "I am surprised, mother, you should give credence to such a scandal. Lord Bramsgrove is a gentleman."

And then for the first time I saw her eyes flash as I had seen Miss Helen's when she was angry.

"I didn't know—" but what I was going to say died on my lips, for all of a sudden John was flying from the house, never stopping to put on his hat, and I saw his grey hair blown about by the wind as he ran to our gate, past which a riderless horse had just galloped; and then Nina and I followed to see him a few minutes after assisting a man, who had evidently been thrown from the horse, to reach our cottage with the aid of Sir Charles, who was leading his mare while.

"Nothing serious, I hope, sir!" I said, opening the gate, and, in doing so, meeting the white, scared face of the girl beside me; but when she saw I was noticing her she turned, and then I could see the tears rush to her eyes.

"I hope not, Mrs. Mathews," Sir Charles replied; "but if old Jones doesn't keep that jeeping brute of his chained up he will be getting into trouble. He came rushing through the hedge like a mad dog, and before Lord Bramsgrove knew where he was, he was unseated. But take care of him a bit," he added, "and I will ride home and send the carriage."

We had laid him down on the horsehair sofa in our best parlour, John and I, Nina standing by with colourless cheeks, and something like a sob, ever and anon, breaking from her.

"Go, fetch some water, Nina," I said, rather sharply, wondering in my mind why it was she should look like that instead of rendering some assistance, as she would have done had it been any of our farm lads, instead of the young lord who had met with the accident.

"I am better now, thank you," he said, after a few minutes, during which I had bathed his temples, and then the doctor came in; and after seeing there were no bones broken, and further than a cut in his head, caused by his having fallen against a stone, nothing much the matter, he assisted him to the carriage which was in waiting for him from the Hall.

And Nina stood watching from the window, through the branches of the big geranium, as they led him down the garden path, he turning but once to look in her direction, and she gazing like one in a dream until John shut the gate as they drove off, and were soon lost in the distance.

"More stunned than anything," he said, when he returned, whilst sitting down to finish his tea, which had become almost cold by this time, notwithstanding that I had had the forethought to place the teapot on the hob; and then, Nina came too, her face still white, and her large eyes filled with tears which would not flow.

"You don't think he is hurt much, then, father?" she asked, while she made believe to eat the raspberries she had already placed on her plate.

"Lor, no," John answered; "but quality

folks make such a jolly fuss about a fall, which, had it been me or any other poor fellow, we might ha' remained in the road until we came to, without anyone's help or pity."

We sat some time after that speaking about it, and how it happened, until the sun, sinking in the west, we knew the harvest-men would be leaving work, and they would require John in the field.

"What was that story about Lord Bramsgrove, mother?" Nina asked, when we were alone; and then I told her, not forgetting to add many another bit of gossip respecting his lordship, for I dreaded that my girl should be drawn away, as others had been, by his false ways; and I determined, when he came to my dairy, which he often had done for a drink of new milk, to beg of him not to trifling with our darling.

But Nina heard all I had to say, never uttering a word until I came to the end, although I could see the colour come and go beneath her clear skin, and then she started to her feet.

"Everyone in the village knew," she said, "May Thorne was a bad girl, and if she threw herself into Lord Bramsgrove's arms no one could blame him."

"And how could you tell what she did or did not do?" I asked, for she was but a child of ten years when it occurred; but she made me no answer, only placing her hat on her glossy hair, and then I saw her go out into the soft evening air, and cross the field where the reapers still were, whilst I stood watching with a big pain at my heart, and a dread that she should be taken from me.

It was scarcely a fortnight after, and I busy with my churn, whilst Nina sat near, fondling two little kittens she had brought from the hayloft, where they had been accustomed to gambol and caper, when looking up from my butter I saw a carriage draw up at our gate, and a lady and gentleman alighted.

"It must be some of the folks from the Hall," I said, turning to where she was, and then I saw her face become suddenly scarlet as Lord Bramsgrove walked up the path, and I gave a peep in the glass to see if I were fit to meet the quality.

"Don't mind us, Mrs. Mathews," his lordship said, raising his hat and giving one of his sweetest smiles. "I must ask you to forgive me for intruding at such a time, but my cousin has heard so much from Lady Brookley of your dairy arrangements that she persuaded me to bring her to see you. You are not cross, are you?"

"Oh! no, my lord," I answered. "I feel honoured and flattered by her ladyship's praise," and then I led his companion and himself to where on cool stone slabs the earthenware pans stood filled with milk, smelling like a nosebag, and the red-brick floor, on which not a speck of dust could be seen, striking so refreshing after the heat of the dusty roads.

She was a tall, fine woman, his companion, with a complexion fair as a lily, and eyes—I never saw any so blue—like the heaven itself, whilst her hair seemed to me as the colour of waving corn in autumn time, and I found myself wondering if this was another cousin, as poor May Thorne had been? But then I remembered she was staying at the Hall, and another thought passed through my mind, which, I don't know why, made me feel sick at heart.

"Have a taste of the cream, miss!" I said, skimming a little into a glass, and clumsy spilling half on the floor, my hand shook so, at which she laughed—such a gentle, rippling laugh—like the music of a thousand tiny bells, whilst two rows of ivory teeth showed between her lips red as coral.

"Nina will bring another glass," I said, not wishing her to sell her dainty kid gloves; but when I looked to where I had left her with the kittens she was gone, and although I called several times there was no answer.

"Oh! never mind," Lord Bramsgrove said, "that is all right," and taking the glass from me with his uncovered hand he held it to the lady.

"I hope your lordship feels none the worse for your accident!" I said, after a moment or two, during which the lady had been expressing her

admiration of my butter, in rich yellow rolls, as it was placed on a shelf over our heads.

He looked round, as if he wondered what I meant, which I thought strange, but the lady unmeaningly treading on one of the kittens which had followed us in, the subject dropped.

Soon after they left, I going on in front to open the gate, when lifting my eyes on my return I saw Nina leaning from the bedroom window, her head almost touching the honeysuckle which clustered around, whilst she strained forward to see the last of their retreating figures, and when she again came down her eyes were red and swollen.

But I took no notice, only speaking of Lord Bramsgrove and his fair cousin, she never answering a word, until, as if she could bear it no longer, she rushed from the room, and I could hear her sobbing as if her heart would break, in the chamber overhead.

CHAPTER III.

THE harvest was all gathered in, the weather continuing fair until the end, and now the partridges ran in and out from the hedges amid the stubble which the gleaners before them had cleared of most every grain of corn.

The Hall, too, was full with visitors from London for the shooting, which was always esteemed good in our part, and Sir Charles was hospitable as any gentleman in the whole of England.

They said Lord Bramsgrove was gone, the gossip in the neighbourhood brought to us by others that he was to be married to the young lady who had been staying with Lady Brookley; but I said nothing, though I knew they were wrong, for I had seen him but the other day, when he came with some message—he made believe from her ladyship—for butter or cream, although I knew well the home dairy contained more than enough for what was wanted, and it was not his lordship who would have been deputed as messenger.

"I know you love flowers," he would say to Nina, when at these times he would bring a lovely rose from the conservatory or a bunch of grapes from the hothouse. "A small return, Mrs. Mathews," he would add, when I was present, "for the curds and whey of which I have robbed you."

"Don't mention that, my lord," I answered, for the curd he had had would have made but a tiny cheese the size of a Neufchâtel, whilst Nina would treasure the flowers till their leaves were all withered and dead, and look on the fruit as too holy to be eaten.

It was on one of these occasions I was from home, for it was market-day, and I had to accompany the lad—for John was ill—to the little town where we were accustomed to sell our butter and eggs, Nina remaining behind to see after father.

Sometimes, when trade was slow, it would be some hours before I could return, but this day such goods were in great demand, and I was home long before the time that I expected.

As I opened the gate, I saw our door was shut—so unlike Nina's habit, whoever had it open, the weather was so warm and lovely; and although I looked for her to come out to meet me there was no sign of life, our dog Carlo alone wagging his tail as I approached, for he had been sitting on the doorstep, waiting to be let in.

"Good dog!" I said, bidding him keep down; and then I turned the handle and entered.

In the parlour John was asleep on the sofa, beside him a chair where evidently some one had been sitting; but no sign of Nina, and when I instinctively turned to where her hat usually hung, it was not there.

I never waited a moment further than to see my husband was all right, when I moved towards the door with the intention of seeking her, but had not proceeded further than the gate, when I saw Lady Brookley coming towards me from the Hall.

I would fain not have seen her, but it was too late, so I remained where I was until she came up.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Mathews," she said, and then I remembered when, eighteen years ago, she had come to me, much in the same way; but she was young and handsome then, and I suppose what was passing in my mind showed itself on my face, for she continued,

"Is anything the matter; you look worried?" "Oh, nothing much, my lady," I answered, "only my poor man being ill I have been obliged to go to market, and maybe I'm a bit tired. Won't you walk in?"

"Oh, no, thank you," she replied, turning her large sunshade so that its crimson lining threw such a colour over her face, making her look quite beautiful still, with those splendid eyes of hers, soft and flashing by turns, as the fancy took her. "I have only come to give you a surprise—a surprise which I doubt not will give you much pleasure."

"Yes, my lady," I answered, when not feeling comfortable that she should stand while talking to me I invited her to a seat beneath a large tree which grew in our garden, just by where the bees flew in and out of the hives placed all in a row on a bench under its branches, and I could hear John breathing heavily in his sleep from the open window of the parlour so near.

"I have had a letter, or rather Sir Charles has," she corrected, closing her sunshade, while I still stood before her, "from Miss Helen."

"Miss Helen, my lady!" I ejaculated, a cold chill creeping all over me. "Thank Heaven, then she is alive!"

"Yes, alive and well," my lady answered; and then she told me that when she left the Hall, so many years ago, she had been secretly married to the eldest son of the Earl of Endscliffe, and that until his death, which had occurred but a few months since, their marriage had been kept secret, the old Earl having fixed his mind on his son marrying a cousin, and threatening to cut him off with but the empty title did he form any other tie. And then my lady went on to tell me that the Earl and Countess were coming to the Hall, when she would bring her to see me, I standing the while like one in a dream, with the songs of the birds resounding in my ears, and the grass, with the hives and the seat where my lady sat, all going round and round before me.

I suppose I looked white and strange, for after a moment she took me by the hand, making me sit down, whilst she held a tiny vinaigrette to my nostrils, I hearing her voice is a dull, senseless way, with the sound like the surging of waters echoing through my head.

But I soon recovered myself, apologising for having been so stupid, when my lady asking me if I was quite sure that I was not going to faint again, said she must leave me now, for it was getting late, and it was time she was back at the Hall.

"The idea of my fainting!" I added, after having assured her ladyship that I was all right, and I laughed; it seemed so absurd that I, an old woman over sixty, should go off like a girl of eighteen, but, all the same, my limbs trembled when I tried to walk.

And then I remembered Nina, and went into the house, just catching a glimpse of my lady's stately figure between the trees as she walked across the park. John had woken up, and was looking around him like one searching for what he could not see, and I knew our girl had not returned.

"Where is she, mother?" he asked, but I could not answer for a great, big lump which rose in my throat and stayed my utterance; and then we two—he and I—watched, whilst hour passed hour and the little room grew dull and gloomy with the shadows of evening creeping into crevice and corner, and our hearts almost audible to each other in their loud beating.

"It is late, dear; go to bed," I said; for I knew he was weak and ill. "I will stay up for Nina!"

For Nina! who never came, but I watched from our window, looking out with weary eyes on the quiet which reigned over all, the trees alone gently swaying to and fro, an occasional bat flying past like an omen of evil, and the Hall grounds bathed in the moonlight; and then

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with stiffened limbs, cramped with the cold preceding the dawn of another day, I turned away. I knew it was useless to stay longer. Nina had left us!

CHAPTER IV.

The following morning I was forced to tell John that we two were alone. At first he could scarcely understand me; but as by degrees the dread truth presented itself to him he seemed like one struck down by a mighty blow, and I could see the tears in his eyes when I begged him to partake of the breakfast which I had prepared for him. But for my sake he made believe to eat a few morsels, and then he arose, weak as he was; and I saw him reach his hat from the peg on which it was accustomed to hang.

"Where are you going, dear?" I asked.

"To the Hall," he answered, "and if it is as I suspect I will tramp the world through but what I'll find and punish the man who has robbed us of our pet lamb!"

"You don't think that, father?" I said, knowing so well what was passing in his mind—my own thought too, all the same that I tried to calm him—for I saw the veins like great cords standing up in his forehead, and I knew how ill and weak he was; and when he went to Sir Charles, as he said he would, I found myself wondering how it would all end.

Even Carlo knew there was something amiss, for he wandered from room to room, and then out into the open air with his tall down, in a dejected sort of way, till I found him, later on, lying near the seat under the big tree—her favourite one—and all I could do he would not move, only looking up sorrowfully into my face, and there I left him, with the tears running down my cheeks.

John came in after awhile, looking sad and weary.

"No, mother," he said, when I would have led him within; "let me sit here in the bright sun. I shall miss her less beneath the blue canopy of Heaven, with the breeze playing around me." So I brought a chair from the house, and when he had rested a moment I crept close to his side.

"Is he there?" I asked, pointing to where the Hall was just visible in the distance, amid the thinning trees.

"I don't know what to make of it, mother," he said, "Lord Bramsgrove, Sir Charles told me, had left Brockley to rejoin his regiment, for he was in the Guards. And yet I could have sworn I saw him pass the window where we were, speaking with a lady, who the servants said was Miss Isabel Drefries, on his arm."

"Why, that's the lady his lordship brought here," I answered, for I remembered I had heard him call her Isabel, and then I drew from my bosom a slip of paper, on which Nina had scrawled a few words, begging us to forgive her, but she had left us to share the lot of one who was dearer to her than life itself.

I showed it to John, having found it after he had gone, and I went upstairs to put the room which was hers to rights.

He read it over and over, his big tears adding to the blots which here had left, and then he gave it back to me. But he became so much worse after that that I almost forgot my first sorrow in the watching him, not knowing, from day to day, when he might be taken from me.

The Earl and Countess of Endcliffe had come to Brockley, but I thought of nothing now but the life which was slowly ebbing away, which was to leave me so sad, so lonely.

The doctor told me there was no hope, and still I clung to the faintest ray, praying that he might be mistaken, that my dear one would live.

It had become very dreary now, the leaves lying dry and withered on the damp earth, whilst the wind sighed and souffled amid the bare branches.

John had been more than usually free from pain. And as I watched by his side, his hand

held in mine, I could see his lips moving as if in prayer.

"You are better, dear?" I asked, even at the last flicker, feeling a hope that the flame of life would burn afresh, whilst I bent down until my face rested on his.

"Better, Janet!" he answered. "Yes, dear, far better, for my Saviour is waiting to receive me there," and he raised his eyes to Heaven. "We have been very happy together," he continued, "through all the long years which have passed, and the little girl we lost here I shall soon be with now; and when your time comes, wife, there will be nothing to divide us then. Don't fret, Janet; not dead, dear, but gone before."

For his sake I endeavoured to control my sorrow, though my heart was breaking, and great sobs would burst from me; but I checked them as best I could, for I knew his time was so short now, and my grief would only take from his peace at the last.

Then he remained quiet—so quiet that for the moment I and the neighbour who had come in to try to give me comfort thought he was gone; and I put my ear to his heart, but I could bear no sound save the sad moaning of the wind without, which at times would shriek as though in mortal pale, and then again die away in solemn silence, whilst I still sat watching for the hue of death to pass over the features I loved so dearly, when the lips again moved; and straining my ears to catch the last sound, I heard the name of Nina, and then, like one in a sleep, his spirit passed away.

"Dead, dead! I thought in my grief, and her name the last on his lips—the girl who in the first agony of my great trouble I looked upon as the cause, by her ungrateful conduct, of hastening his end; and at the moment, in the madness of my sorrow, I almost hated her, who had brought such care to our once happy home.

After John's funeral I became calmer. I did not care to see anyone, though there was much I was obliged to attend to—for I had been left very comfortable, and determined to dispose of the farm as soon as possible; so I put it in the hands of the agents, and stayed, hoping each day to hear they had an offer for it.

I was very glad Miss Helen—the Countess of Endcliffe as I ought to call her, but could never bring myself to do—didn't come to see me, at the same time that I felt it a little that she had no thought for me in my trouble.

We were well into November now, and I was thinking of all that had passed in those long years, since she brought me that baby with the snow all hanging about her, to the day when she had become a woman, and gone from me without a word, without one kiss for the many I had showered upon her in her infancy, and then a longing to know the story of her birth came over me.

I suppose I was very deep in thought, for, although it was early in the day, and the sun struggling through the heavy grey clouds, shining in a sickly kind of way over the ploughed fields and bare hedgerows, I gave quite a start when the handle of my door turned, and a lady entered.

"I hope you will forgive me, Mrs. Mathews," she said, "but I thought you did not hear me knock!"

"No, ma'am," I answered, in a confused kind of way. "I am not quite so quick of hearing as I used to be, and it's so seldom anyone comes to see me now excepting Mrs. Smith over the road," and I dusted a chair, drawing it up to the fire that she might sit down.

"No!" she answered, in a questioning kind of tone. "You must be very lonely. I am staying at the Hall, you know, though I suppose you have no idea who I am!"

I looked at her then, starting back the while, and then I knew it was Miss Helen—the Countess.

"Miss Helen!" I cried, falling on my knees and kissing her hands, on which my tears poured like rain, "and I not to know you—your old nurse!"

"Not to be wondered at," she answered,

making me get up. "I was a girl when you saw me last; I am almost an old woman now."

"Yes, miss—my lady I mean," I said, at which she smiled. "It is a long time ago, and I have seen so much sorrow since then; and although Lady Brockley told me all about it, John's death put it all out of my head, and I had almost forgotten you were at the Hall."

"Poor John!" she said; then, after a pause, "so Lady Brockley told you all, did she? Just like her. How little altered she is!" and she laughed. "And you, nurse, did you return confidences?"

"No, miss—you don't mind my calling you so, do you?" I asked, apologising. "I told her ladyship nothing. But I have often thought about it; and I think it only right, if the child you brought to me that night was yours, you should restore her to her proper position as your daughter."

She looked at me then—a wild, scared look coming into her eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "That child—is she not dead then? I came to show you what I had done, and to hear all about what had occurred since I went away."

But when I would have sat down and told her all, she, with the impatience so natural to her, said she couldn't stay to hear then; I must put on my bonnet and go out with her before it got too late.

So I went upstairs, returning with my heavy cape veil, which ever reminded me of him I had lost; and then we two went out, she leading me on until we reached the gate which opened to the churchyard, where the jackdaws, flying and cawing from the belfry tower, spoke alone of life around the quiet resting-place of the dead.

"Look there, nurse!" she said, pointing to a marble stone placed but recently at the head of my husband's grave, "you can see enough to read that, can't you?"

"Yes, my lady," I answered, kneeling down where, a few weeks since, I had laid John to rest by our own little baby, who had died after but six months of infant life. "My heart is too full to thank you, my lady!" I said, my tears falling on the pure white stone which had been erected.

"Sacred to the memory of John Mathews, who died September 29th, 1885, and his infant daughter."

There was no date further; no age of the baby girl whose tiny grave nestled so close to the larger one, and then I knew how the mistake had arisen. Miss Helen had forgotten all about the birth and death of our little one; and when the parish clerk, of whom she had made inquiries, had pointed out the spot where the man lay, whose last resting-place she wished to honour, and told her whose child it was that lay beneath the little mound, her thoughts came to the one conclusion.

"I am very sorry," she said, when I enlightened her; "I had hoped otherwise, nurse;" then, adding all of a sudden, "where is she now?"

For the moment I could not answer her. How could I tell her? She was gone, I knew not where, when, as suddenly, she caught me by the wrist.

"I know!" she said, like as if it had just come to her mind. "They were talking about it up at the Hall. A girl from the village supposed to have left with one of the gentlemen who had come for the shooting! It is true!"

We were standing close to the stone, so pure and white, placed there by her orders; and I, not knowing how to answer her—she all the while studying my face and thinking—I knew the worst!

"Come away!" she said, at last; "and I only wish that little grave had indeed been hers!" and then we went out, closing the gate behind us, as the snow, which had long threatened, came down in a steady way—large flakes which, before the morn, had spread a mantle of virgin whiteness over the green beds of the sleeping dead.

CHAPTER V.

I HAD sold the farm at last, taking with me a few things which I treasured to Mrs. Smith's, who had offered me a home. Carlo coming with me. He looked so pitiful I couldn't find it in my heart to part with him, even feeling a comfort in being able to see the old homestead from Mrs. Smith's window, where John and I had passed so many happy years.

I became gradually more resigned to my lot. It was a bitter winter, and when I saw the sufferings of others I felt how wicked I was to rebel against Heaven's will—I, who had so much to be thankful for.

And so the days passed, cold, freezing days, with large icicles hanging like the pendants of a lustre from branch and bough, and the ducks looking wistfully where the pond was frozen over, and they could get no further than where the ice had been broken for the horses to drink.

But, for all, the sun shone brightly, and the country was a picture in its winter beauty, when one morning a child, one of the neighbours', ran in excited and breathless to where I sat by the warm hearth.

"A letter for you, Mrs. Mathews!" he said, holding it between the fingers of his red, chubby hand. "They gave it me up at the village—the postmistress did."

Our post-office was but a small shop where the villagers bought what was necessary to their frugal wants; and excepting the gentlefolks who sent their servants, there was little calling for letters. So I took this one from the child, for the moment thinking he must have made some mistake; but when I saw the writing all the blood seemed to go from my heart, and a sort of faint feeling came over me.

The boy even seemed to notice my agitation, asking me if I weren't well, and fixing his pretty baby eyes on me in anxious fear.

"Me well! Yes, child!" I answered, and then I gave him a penny and sent him off to play, fearing I should not have time to read my precious letter before Mrs. Smith's return, who was gone to buy something for dinner; so when I heard his tiny feet patter over the brick floor leading to the outward door, then I knew I was alone.

For some time I remained, twisting and turning it in my hand, reading the postmarks, even to the date on which it was posted before I felt I had the courage to open and read it.

I wasn't much of a scholar, for in my days there was no school board, and I was little more than a child when I had to earn my own bread; but I got a little learning—enough to read and write as well as most girls I then knew; so breaking open the envelope I unfolded the paper it enclosed, knowing before I had read it that it was from Nina. Yes, from Nina, and headed "Myrtle Villa, Maida Vale, London, December 18th."

"Maida Vale," I reflected; "just the kind of place in which she, who so loved the trees and the sloping green hills, would build her nest," and then I pictured to myself my darling in her new home, sheltered from the bitter winds of winter, whilst I read on,—

"DEAR MOTHER.—You have not forgotten me quite, have you? for I have never forgotten you and father" (here my tears so blinded me that the letter became all blurred and confused, falling as they did with a splash on the white paper; but I wiped them off and dried my eyes as best I could, and then I became calmer whilst I spelled out the rest). "It is the only thought which has made me feel unhappy in my great happiness. Dear mother, do come and see me—I have sent an order for the money it will cost you. You can change it at the post-office, and father will mind the place"—"the place," I cried to myself, "gone, sold now weeks ago," and I buried my face in my hands whilst I wept as though my poor old heart would break.

It was then I heard Mrs. Smith's footstep without, so I hastily stopped crying, and lifting the letter from the floor where it had fallen,

saw for the first time a greenish piece of printed paper, with a round like a post-mark on it, and at one corner, in a kind of marked square, a large 2 placed under a £.

I showed it to Mrs. Smith afterwards, asking what it all meant, for I had never seen such a thing in my life before, and then she told me—the print was so small I could not read it—that the order was made payable to me, Janet Mathews, from—, showing me where I had to put my name, and then they, the post-office, would give me two pounds, I only having to tell them who sent it.

It was some time before I could understand, for I was but an ignorant old woman, not fit to go further than the little town where I had been accustomed to sell my butter and eggs each market-day.

But Nina had given me full directions, and so happy did I feel at the thought of seeing her once more that I soon found myself anxious as a girl to start on my journey.

There was only one thing I felt I must do, and that was see Miss Helen before I started; so after writing as best I could to Nina, I set off for the Hall, having told Mrs. Smith I should leave her on the morrow.

The snow was pretty deep on the path which led to the servants' entrance, and the wind in the branches overhead, as I walked along, moaned and sighed, making me feel quite melancholy-like; and I wasn't sorry when they bade me sit in the warm servants' hall whilst one of them told the Countess I wanted to see her.

"They are at dinner now, old lady," a footman said to me, giving himself, as I thought, mighty airs; "but sit down by the fire, and when the ladies go to the drawin'-room, the Countess's maid will tell 'er ladyship you have 'ere."

I felt quite spiteful when, after saying that, he tossed his head and walked out, grander than Sir Charles himself, wishing to be able to have stuck a pin in his silk-covered calves; for it seemed so long whilst I sat there all alone, save when one or the other of the servants came in and out, taking no more notice of me than if I had been an image like those on the chimney-piece, where a shepherdess had her arm round a little lamb, and the old one looking up at her while.

But at last, Marie, the Countess's maid, tripped in, her little feet seemingly scarce touching the floor—she trod so quick and light.

"Are you Mrs. Mathews?" she asked, unable to pronounce the "h," and when I told her I was, "Diss way den, 'ef you please," she said, and I followed her, treading over carpets in which one's feet sank as in the soft turf of a summer's lawn, up a broad staircase carpeted the same, over which was a rose-coloured light, thrown by the shades of the lamps burning here and there.

I walked very slow, mademoiselle waiting for me at the top of the staircase, for I could not help looking at the large pictures and marble figures, which seemed to meet me at every turn, wondering in my simplicity how so many beautiful things could be got together.

But I saw Marie was growing impatient, so I followed on brisker, until she showed me into a lovely room, divided from another with such lovely lace curtains, over which crimson ones of rich velvet partly hung; and through these she passed, returning a moment after to say her ladyship would see me.

At first I could scarcely believe it was Miss Helen, she looked so beautiful, dressed as she was in ruby velvet, the body low; her neck, white as the snow itself, was bare, save for a necklace with pendants like the frozen icicles without, only glittering that they made my poor old eyes dazzle with their brightness.

"Sit down, nurse!" she said, bringing a chair with her own white hands to the fire, into which I almost fell—it was so soft and springy. "And now tell me what it is you have to say? Lady Brockley has gone to a concert, so there is no fear of our being disturbed."

"I am glad of that, Countess," I said, and then I pulled Nina's letter from my bosom, where I had placed it.

"Norton! Norton!" Miss Helen kept repeating when she had read to the end. "What does it mean, nurse? Did you know anyone of that name?" she asked. "There was no one here, I am sure."

"That's more than I can tell, my lady," I answered. "I never heard the name before, our folks being but hard-working people like poor John and I were."

"Of course you are going!" she said; "and yet—it seems a great undertaking for anyone at your time of life!"

I did not answer for the moment. We were both thinking, she and I, of the same thing, but at last—

"I am stronger than you think, Countess," I said, "I start to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" she answered, pondering a moment. "I am going too, with the Earl, to London to-morrow to our town residence. You can travel with Marie, for we have invitations to be present at the marriage of Lord Bransgrove, which takes place on the 20th, and I am quite glad to think you will have someone to take care of you, for you would be sure to get run over or something, in the big city, you dear old nurse;" and she jumped up, kissing my old withered face, as she had done, my own Miss Helen, in the days long past.

I didn't stay long after, only just long enough to receive instructions to be in readiness, when a servant from the Hall would be sent for me on the following morning, and then, when I rose to leave,--

"I feel happier now, nurse!" she said.

And I knew what she meant—happier that we had found Nina.

CHAPTER VI.

THE following morning I was ready long before the time, when a carriage from the Hall came for me, with Marie inside, and the Countess's trunks on the roof.

I had never closed an eye all night, thinking of my journey, and the seeing my darling at the end.

Carlo whined when he saw me leave, but Mrs. Smith promised to take care of him till my return; so I bid her good-bye and then we started for the little town where the station was.

The Earl and Countess were there when we arrived, and Marie made me sit down in the waiting-room whilst she attended on her ladyship, seeing to her wraps and rugs, with the hot-water bottle for her feet, for it was terribly cold.

It was only a small station; but to me it seemed there was a great bustle, when, as a porter rang the bell a train came rushing in, making me start to my feet; and it was but a moment when Marie came in breathless, telling me to look sharp and put my best foot forward, for the train was just about to start, whilst she almost dragged me to where the carriage was into which I was pushed, Marie forgetting I was an old woman, and not young and active like herself. And then we were off, the trees and fields flying past, and I found myself holding on to the sides of the compartment where we were, as I thought each moment we must be dashed into stony.

At last we reached London, so Marie told me, when, having stopped at several little stations, we came to where it seemed to me it was nothing but noise and smoke—my poor old head all in a whirl—as we flew over the tops of the houses, and looked down on the streets, where people were continually coming and going, and omnibuses and carts were running one against the other.

I was so thankful that Miss Helen had let me come with Marie when I saw what a big place London was, although she did in her quick French way pull me out on to the platform, and there leave me whilst she flew to see after her lady's luggage, I the while, like one in a dream, looking on the confusion about me.

"Come along," I heard her say at last. "My lady says you must have something to eat, and

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den you can go to—let me see where it is!" and she read the address. I showed her where my darling was.

But the Countess would not hear of my going alone.

"Poor old nurse, she will be lost for a certainty," I heard her say to Maria. "Go with her to Maida Vale, and then follow on to Lowndes Square."

So a few moments later we were in a cab, each step bringing me nearer Nina's home.

"That's right, cabby," she said at last, putting her head out of the window to stop the cabman, I looking round the while in wonder, unable to see the valley and the green slopes I had expected, in place of the houses with but a narrow patch of ground between each, which was all my eyes rested on.

But Maria only laughed when I told her how disappointed I was, and then wishing me good-bye, saying I was all right now, she left me to ring the bell, whilst the cab went off with her to her lodgings' house.

There was but little snow, no big mounds up to the hedges like I had left at home in Brockley, only a slight covering of white, not much more than a hoar-frost, resting on the branches of the trees which overhung the gate where I stood.

Very soon I heard someone coming, and when I asked the servant who opened the door if Mrs. Norton lived there she answered "Yes," asking me if I was the old lady her mistress expected.

I answered that I was—her mother, I added when I thought I saw her smile—not that I much wondered, for I felt what a quaint, queer, little figure I was here, where all were so different, but she said no more than to tell me to follow her.

But when she opened the door of the room and I went in, except at Brockley Hall I never saw anything so beautiful.

There was a large fire burning, which made the steel of the fender and the iron to shine like silver, whilst lamps placed all about—little lamps with crimson shades—threw a colour like a rose all over the place.

"Oh, mother! dear, dear mother!" and then from the far end, divided from where I stood with cream lace curtains, delicate as a spider's web, Nina came to meet me, throwing her arms round me, and kissing my withered cheek just as she used to do when it was round and rosy as her own—I the while almost afraid to come near her, she was so beautiful; her dress of rich cardinal velvet, with lace, and the diamonds sparkling on her neck and arms white as driven snow.

"How lovely you do look, Nina!" I said, and then I cast my eyes all round the room—her room. How different to our own little humble home at Brockley, wondering who Mr. Norton was, and how rich he must be that he could give my pretty bird such a cage!

I suppose she read my thoughts in my face, for she raised her velvet eyes so full of happiness to mine.

"Come and sit down, mother!" she said, "I have so longed to tell you how good he is, and how fondly I love him."

"Of course, Nina, I understand all that," I answered, with a smile, for had I not been as happy when John first called me wife? "But why did you not tell me you were going to be married, and let me see this Mr. Norton—this husband of yours?"

She remained silent, I watching, and not able to understand why it was she did not speak, whilst the colour rose on her lovely cheek until her face became red as her dress to her very temples, and she twisting and turning the gold ring on her third finger.

"Be—because, mother, dear, he was a gentleman, and I only a poor girl, and I loved him so much that when he told me that if I did not keep my own counsel he must give me up, I felt I must do so or die!"

Poor girl! "Nina," I could not help saying, "even had you been nothing more than a poor girl, why should he wish to disown his wife?" and I wanted to tell her the rest; but somehow I could not get the words out, so only asked her when she was married.

But when, after a few moments, she told me the truth with the tears in her eyes—the eyes I loved so well—and she kneeling the while at my feet, the room with all its beautiful mirrors and pictures seemed to whirl round and round, the marble and bronze figures which before looked so splendid, jeering at me with pointed fingers from each corner in which they stood. And then I told her—my own heart breaking with its great sorrow—how I would rather have seen her in her coffin and let my tears fall on her grave than have met her as I did now.

"A toy for the time, a doll to deck with his diamonds, Nina!" I said, "and then to be thrown aside, as Lord Bramsgrove cast away May Thorne."

She started to her feet now, her eyes flashing as I had seen them once before, with sparks of fire bright like those from the diamonds round her throat.

"It is false!" she said, "and I will not hear it, not even from you, though you are my mother. Lord Bramsgrove never loved May Thorne!"

"He told her so," I answered, "much the same as doubtless Mr. Norton has told you."

She caught her breath then, like one who had unknowingly betrayed themselves, but it was only a moment, and her mood changed.

"He loves me!" she said; "indeed, indeed, he does. He told me so but yesterday when he went away, and bid me good-bye, while he pressed me to his heart, saying, 'I shall soon return. Nina, my Nina! you will always love me, won't you?'" and then she told me that they were to be married when his father died, but that during his lifetime he could not make her his wife, unless by bringing beggary on both.

We were quiet for a short time after, I looking at things as an old woman would, and she trusting to him with all the faith which in her young mind nothing could break. So I could not find it in my heart to awaken her before the time which I knew too well would surely come from her dream of happiness; and when she saw I was relenting she again threw herself at my feet, kissing my hands, my knees; and I gazing down on her with such love that had she been twice as fallen would have me still nestle her close to my side.

She was again my darling—the girl I had nursed and fondled and taught to call me mother; so I drew her towards me, laying her head on my shoulder and stroking her glowing hair; she the while telling me of her great love for this man who dare not call her wife, and I listening, my heart aching as it had not done since I laid John to rest in his last narrow bed.

I had not even told her of that, and she, so full of her own story, had never noticed my deep crape, and the long veil hanging from my black bonnet, until on turning its heavy folds fell on her head.

I told her then, her tears falling like rain, for she had thought in her prosperity how much she should be able to do for us who were so poor, having put fifty pounds in crisp bank-notes away for the little farm which was ours—now sold and in the hands of strangers.

But we do not live for the dead but the living, so after a while Nina dried her eyes and then she led me to another room, and another—all so beautiful that I could scarcely choose which I liked best—until she led me to a small one leading from her own bedroom, which to me seemed like the palace of some fairy princess.

It was her boudoir, she said, I little knowing what that was at first, until I remembered the Countess's in Brockley Hall, and that not half so beautiful; so I trod, almost fearing to put my feet on the carpet—it was so soft and thick—my eyes wandering from one thing to another and resting on the pictures, which hung, large ones on the wall, with little ones—photos she called them—standing here and there all around.

I took them up, mostly people I did not know, when Nina came quickly forward.

"Never mind those, mother," she said, "you have seen enough, and must be hungry and tired."

She would have drawn me away, but I was looking at a picture I had picked out from the rest. It was the one likeness which amongst them all I knew, and then I turned to where Nina was waiting for me, a dull heavy pain at my heart, which sank in my bosom like lead.

She was right. I had seen enough!

CHAPTER VII.

"How is it that this man's photo is amongst them!" I said, still standing with the picture in my hand, notwithstanding that she was using every endeavour to draw me from the spot. "Is he a friend of yours?" "husband, I was going to say, but the word choked me, so I added of Mr. Norton instead.

"Don't look like that, mother," she answered. "You know I told you how my tongue was tied, and I cannot break my promise to him."

The words had come from her in a disjointed kind of way, she the while kneeling at my feet, for she had made me sit down on the couch with its blue satin covering, so delicate I feared even to place a finger on its richness, and looking up into my face, a world of pain in her lovely eyes.

"I wish I could tell you all, mother," she said, "I should feel happier," and then she became quiet again, as though weighing in her mind whether she would break her word or no. After a moment, with a voice scarcely above a whisper, and her soft, fair hands pressed on mine,—

"Do you think it would be very wrong?" she asked.

"My darling!" I said, lifting her from the ground, and drawing her head with all its thick, heavy braids down on my shoulder, "trust me, Nina, and if I find there is nothing but what you have told me to stand between you and the honour dearest of all to women, I will not speak until the time comes for him to fulfil his promise."

She raised her beautiful rounded arm then, clasping it round my neck with the diamonds which seemed to me to flash with angry sparks of fire—for I was a foolish, fanciful old woman—falling back till they almost reached her elbow.

"Dear, dear mother!" she said, whilst she smothered me with kisses, and then she poured into my ears the story which was to have been kept secret. Good Heavens! and I heard it all, listening to the end, whilst I could feel my own heart beating wildly with the indignation I could not school my tongue to speak.

"My poor, poor child!" I said at last, staying a moment before I could bring myself to tell her that which I knew would load her with misery, and she so happy in her blinded faith.

I thought at one time I would not disturb the trust she had, till I remembered—knowing so well how it would all end—that the scales would sooner or later fall from her eyes, and she would learn how she had been betrayed from others less gentle than I was, so I told her.

But she did not go into hysterics, nor did she faint when I had finished my story, only the colour swept from her face, leaving it white as marble; and into her eyes, so full but a short time since of love and happiness, there came such a look of agony as one would never hope to see again.

Then she rose slowly to her feet.

"Take me away, mother!" she said; "back to Brockley—I could not die here," and she looked round with a shudder, whilst unclasping the diamonds from her neck and arms she placed them on the table, as if their very touch stung her like scorpions.

"Back to Brockley! Yes, dear," I answered, almost glad, selfish as I was, that we two should be again together, with no one to live for but ourselves.

"But the Countess!" I thought, consoling myself after with the recollection that further than to be assured that she was safe, Miss Helen did not care to know more of the girl whom she

had hoped was laid to rest beneath the green turf, amidst which the daisies peeped out over a baby's grave.

And so I took my darling away from all the splendour which surrounded her, she moving like one in a dream, as she collected one or two articles which were hers before she entered his home, and I placing them in a small bag she gave me for the purpose—his likeness amongst the number, after she had removed it from the costly frame which had held it, kissing it as if it were a thing of life, and then putting it away with the others.

I knew she wrote to him, for I watched her as she sat by a tiny inlaid table, and saw how her hand shook the while, and great big tears falling like rain on the paper.

"I am ready now, mother," she said, at last, after having wrapped herself in a heavy fur-lined cloak, and pulling a thick veil over her face. "I shall not be back to-night," she answered, in reply to Mary, who had now entered to see if her mistress required anything; and then we two went out, she and I—Nina never looking back after she had said good-bye with a voice, such agony in its tone as I shall never forget, to her pet canary, telling the girl to be sure and not to forget to feed it.

It was bitterly cold, the snow which remained on the pathway crushing beneath our feet; but she seemed unconscious to all, walking on silently by my side until we came to a pillar-post, into which she put her letter, when, turning to me,—

"We will take a cab, mother," she said. "I don't want to walk further now."

So we walked on the kerbstone until one should pass that was not already occupied; the snow beginning to come down now in large feathery flakes, blinding the cabman whose attention we had endeavoured to attract, so that he would have passed on had not a gentleman, seeing how it was, called out to him to stop.

I was only thinking of the time, for I knew we had not a moment to spare to catch the last train for Brockley; and I was so anxious to be home again with my darling that I scarcely noticed how she was trembling by my side, almost making me to fall on the slippery road in her haste to enter the cab, which had now pulled up; but she was soon in, turning her face, which was already hidden beneath her thick veil, to the other side, and I followed, only waiting to thank the gentleman for his kindness, when somehow my voice caused him to start.

"You in London, Mrs. Mathews!" he exclaimed, and would have stayed to have said more had I not told him I was sorry, but we were afraid to lose the train, so he merely raised his hat and passed on.

I had no need to ask any question of Nina, for long before I had she had recognised him in the dim, uncertain light, and I could almost hear her heart, it was beating so wildly, whilst a dry, hard sob would at times escape her lip.

CHAPTER VIII.

I LOOKED out once after we had started, and notwithstanding that it was snowing so hard, I thought I could see the gentleman still on the pavement, watching our cab, but it was getting dark, and we soon became lost amidst the bustle and confusion of the busy streets.

So anxious was I to get away from London that I never thought of the many miles I had travelled—in a strange city, too, and I an old woman who would never again see sixty; but I knew no fatigue, only wanting to be at home again, and my darling with me, as in the days gone by only—that John was not with us now.

So I took her to Brockley, Mrs. Smith wondering but saying little, when we came back so late, that all the lights in the village were out, and Nina never shedding a tear, a bright, feverish light in her velvet eyes, making her more beautiful still, with a colour like that of a carnation burning in each cheek.

Carlo understood her best, for he did not jump and bark about, as was his custom to show his delight, but approached her in a sympathetic

caressing sort of way, putting his nose into her hands, and looking up, as much as to say, "you know how sorry I am for you," and then, for the first time since we had left London, I saw her eyes become moistened.

"Carlo, dear, dear old Carlo!" she said, throwing her arms round the dog's neck, and letting her tears fall on his rough, shaggy coat, whilst he licked her face, her arms, in an ecstasy of delight. "Are you really glad to see me again?"

"We are all glad to see you back, Miss Nina," Mrs. Smith said, kindly, seeing how her young heart was breaking, and she was an old tried friend, having known her when she first came to us, now eighteen years since.

"But you don't know, Mrs. Smith," she answered, and then I told her to get up—for she was sobbing bitterly now—and she must not give way, but have something to eat, and after a good night's rest she would be our Nina again as she used to be.

She rose from her knees, but she only made believe to touch a morsel of the supper Mrs. Smith prepared, and said she was too tired to eat. So I put her to bed, just as I had done in all those years gone by, watching by her side until her heavy eyes closed, and I knew by her quiet breathing she was asleep.

Then I lay down too, for I was sorely wearied, but I could not sleep, hearing each hour strike by the clock in Brockley church.

It was two in the morning, and I found myself dozing off, when all of a sudden she woke up.

"Don't you hear the bells ringing, mother?" she asked. "Hush! they are ringing a wedding peal! Are they for him? Tell me."

I looked down, thinking for the moment she was talking in her sleep, but when I took her hand in mine it was hot and burning, and her eyes were wide open, with a restless strange look I had never seen there before.

"Yes," she continued, finding I did not answer. "I know they made him marry her, for she is rich, and I am only a poor girl, but see, mother, how he looks at me! He is holding out his arm to me. He does love me, and you even said he was false, and it is not true!"

She would have risen from the bed then but I held her gently back, and then her strength gave way, her mind alone active as she wandered in her talk—at one time thinking she was with John, in the fields with the golden corn, and the red poppies, till in her fancy she was again in the house at Maida Vale with him who had so cruelly betrayed her.

I got up and dressed, knowing I could not get a doctor till the morning, so I lit a fire, and put some cold vinegar rags on her hot temples, she taking me for someone else as I watched for the dawn, becoming numb and cold, and the winter's sun so long in rising from the dark grey of the early clouds.

For weeks after that she lay on a bed of sickness, at one time all hope that her young life would be spared gone; and then she arose, like a flower which had been beaten down by the rain, her brightness, the joyousness of her youth, gone for ever.

We had had a bitter winter, but it had passed now, and the hedgerows were one mound of primroses, the fresh green leaves and budding trees all speaking of a new life, which to Nina, seemed to have opened too.

But the sadness which her dreadful sorrow seemed to have left was ever with her, though she never repined—always gentle, even happy in her way.

"You loved once, mother!" she said, when, on one occasion, we visited John's grave, where the spring flowers were growing. "And you buried your love as I have mine. At one time I prayed to die, for I felt the same earth could not contain us two, but Heaven knew best, and now I am glad—so glad. I was so young to leave this beautiful world, and I have you, dear, and the birds and the flowers still!"

There had been changes up at the Hall, too, since that day on which I had travelled, now five months ago, to London.

Lady Brockley had died after a short illness

from an attack of bronchitis, and I was told that the Earl and Countess were going to reside there with Sir Charles, who fretted so much, they said, after his beautiful wife.

So it came into my mind that justice should be done to my darling, for when I was gone—and I was getting very old now, never knowing when I should be called to rest, where John was resting—what would become of her.

Nina thought I was silent—thinking of my poor man, so asked no questions, sitting as she did on our baby's grave, with her large sad eyes taking in all that was beautiful around us, and now and then picking a daisy carelessly to pieces.

That night I determined to see Miss Helen—the Countess I mean; so after tea, and I knew the dinner at the Hall would be finished, I put on my bonnet and shawl and walked across the park.

"You want to see me lady, Mrs. Mathews?" Maria asked, when she had been summoned by the footman, and I awaited her in the servants' hall.

"I do," I answered, "having something very important to say to her ladyship."

So after keeping me waiting for another half-hour I was shown into the drawing-room where the Countess was.

"I am all alone, Mathews," she said, "so will see you here before the gentlemen come in. Sit down," she continued, smiling, for I was afraid—the chairs were so splendid—that I should spoil their beauty; so I sat down wondering in my mind how I should commence.

"Well, nurse, what is it?" she said, seeing my hesitation.

"I hope you won't be angry, my lady," I began, "but you see I am getting old, and I was thinking I shall not be here long, and when I am gone what is to become of Miss Nina?"

I saw a frown pass over her face, and then she replied,—

"Your daughter I suppose you mean, nurse. If anything happens to you—which I see no reason to fear will for many a year to come—I give you my word she shall be provided for."

"My daughter! Oh, Miss Helen! my lady! surely you will not be so unjust as to withhold from her what is hers by right!"

"You are a very foolish old woman," she answered, telling me to get up, for I had thrown myself on my knees at her feet; "for even supposing Nina in every other respect fitted to fill the position in which you are anxious to place her, do you think, after the manner in which she left Brockley, the Earl would ever sanction such a proceeding, did I enlighten him with regard to the rest, which at present I have not done? No, no! take my word for it, nurse, she is far happier to let matters rest as they are at present."

"Far happier you say, my lady, when, had it been otherwise, she would have now been the wife of the man whom she believes to have been false to her; but you must excuse me, Countess," I added; "I suppose I look at things different to society folks."

She smiled then, telling me she would do all she could, but I must not ask impossibilities; and then she bid me good-bye, ringing the bell that a servant might show me out, and I knew it was useless to say more; so I went home, treading down the soft grass beneath my feet of the park, now bathed in the moonlight, thinking the while what a beautiful world it was to be so badly peopled!

CHAPTER IX.

I saw the Countess several times after that, but said nothing farther, leaving it to time to work what I knew Providence would in its own way bring to pass. As to Nina, she never repined now, living on in her own quiet way, a settled sadness in her lovely eyes which made her more beautiful still, even bringing her at times to speak of her past sorrow, and never a word of blame for the man who had wrecked her young life.

Two years passed, bringing little change, and

we two shut out from the world as completely as though the grave had closed over each.

It was then, that one night in the late autumn, I was sent for from the Hall. The Countess was dying, so they said, and I was to be quick, or I should not see her alive; and how wet and dreary it was, the wind sighing and sighing in the branches overhead, whilst I trod down the damp, dead leaves in the path leading through the park which was the way to the servants' entrance!

One might almost have fancied that death had already entered within—such a silent, heavy stillness hung over all the household; and Marie spoke only in a low whisper when she for the third time led me to where the Countess awaited me.

We were ascending the stairs, on which the lamps even had been so lowered as to add to the general gloom, when a sudden crashing of wheels on the gravel without caused me to start.

"Dat ces his lordship, I expect," Marie said, and then she approached, I following, to a door on the right of the corridor. I knew it so well—it was the Countess's.

There was but little light in the room when we entered, but from the bed, with its silken and lace hanging; at the end, I could hear the heavy, laborious breathing of her whom I had come to see, whilst Sir Charles and the Earl each on either side were watching, with the pain of the parting they could not avert already depicted on their countenances. And then someone else came in at the door—it was Lord Bramsgrove.

"Mrs. Mathews has come, dear!" I heard one of them say; and then she made an effort as if to rise, but fell back, when her husband motioned to me to come nearer.

So I advanced to where she lay, and knew at the first sight that she had sent for me to say good-bye. Her face—oh! how altered since I had seen her last, the dark eyes looking so large, and the lines all round showing quite plainly; whilst her hair, still thick and heavy, had great streaks of grey running all through it.

"Come here, nurse," she said, with difficulty. "I dare say you can guess what it is I want to say," and as I moved forward the Earl stepped aside, but she held him with her thin transparent hand, which had already begun to pluck the coverings before they would remain still for ever.

"No, no, Basil! You must stay and hear all, that you may undo the wrong I have done!" she said.

So he stayed, sitting down by her side and caressing her long tresses, as he had done when they were black and glossy, and they both young together.

"You know when I fled with you from Brockley, dear!" she began. "I told you that I would place our baby—of whose birth no one knew—with a woman on whom I could implicitly rely to take charge of her until such a time as we could make our marriage public, and remove her to our home. Years passed, however, without our being able to do so; and never having seen the child since that night—and oh! what a night it was—when I put it into the arms of my old nurse—the regret which the first parting caused me soon passed away, and not only did I at times cease to remember its existence, but when it did come to my recollection I prayed that it might be dead; and even if alive my pride told me that after so many years having elapsed, in which she would have been brought up as their daughter, it was impossible on my part to restore her to her proper position. On our return to Brockley, the first thing I did was to go to Nurse Mathews. I saw her through the window; she was alone, and it was then that a fear came over me that she would insist on my doing what was right if, should the child be living, she knew the story of which, until then, she had been in ignorance."

The Earl bade me moisten her lips now, for they had become dry and parched; so I stooped down, my hand shaking whilst I held a glass to the mouth I had so often kissed when a child.

"Thank you, nurse," she said, just as she used to do in those years so long passed; and then she continued: "I went away then, a few days after by chance learning from the old sexton—whom I accidentally met in the churchyard—that John Mathews was dead,

when I determined, in gratitude for the kindness his wife had shown me when I went to her on that night of my trouble, that I would erect a stone to his memory. So I asked him to show me where he was buried. He did so, and when I wanted to know what the little grave meant which was so near his, he told me it was that of their baby."

A spasm of pain for a moment contracted her features, and Sir Charles and the Earl both wanted her to say no more, only to remain still and happy during the short time she had to stay—for they knew as well as I did that she had not long to live; whilst the tears rose to my eyes, courting each other down my old withered cheek, for I could not forget how dear she had been to me in the past.

"No, no," she answered, "I could not die with that sin upon my soul—the sin which in my pride and selfishness made me deny my own child."

"I was happy in the belief which the sexton's story had engendered in my mind, and when but a short time after Nurse told me how I had been mistaken, my anger upset my reason, and I determined the girl she said was mine should never know me as her mother.

"Nina, our child, Basil," and she turned to where the Earl was anxiously listening, wondering the while what the end would be, "was gone then, leaving no clue behind her, but a strange coincidence, that Arthur Bramsgrove, who had been staying with my father and Lady Brockley, had left the Hall at the same time.

"However, shortly after, Nurse Mathews had a letter requesting her to go to London. It was just what we, dear, were going to town to be present at the marriage of Lord Arthur's twin-brother, so I persuaded her to travel with us in company with Marie. I knew she was going to Nina, and I was not so heartless but that I was glad to hear she was found. Further than that I did not trouble myself, neither learning nor caring to know more, only remaining more than ever resolved to disown her when I heard the sequel of her story from Marie, who in some way had come to know all about it."

From time to time I had moistened her lips, seeing how much she was suffering. Notwithstanding that she would insist on doing Nina justice in the end, every word seemingly to me raising up a barrier between us who had been all in all to each other, since that day on which I brought her back to my home and my love, until in my heart I was almost glad there was a history in her past, which would make the grand folks turn their backs on her, although she was one of themselves, whilst her very sorrow was the tie which would bind her nearer to me.

"Would not you wish to see her, Nelly, before—*you die!*" the Earl was going to say, but his sobs choked his utterance, and then he buried his face in the coverlet, whilst his strong frame shook with the agony of his grief.

Sir Charles had come round to where I was standing now, his hair to me seeming to have grown suddenly white, as, touching me gently on the arm, he pointed to where the Countess was valiantly endeavouring to speak.

After her last effort her strength had gone, and it was with difficulty she could bring her lips to utter another word; so I leaned down, my ear so close, yet I could but faintly understand, "Nina, Arthur," the only sound clear to me, and then I asked her if I should bring her to her bedside, when Lord Bramsgrove approached.

She could not answer, only looking to him, but she pressed my hand, and so I left her, praying that she might live till my return; and once again I was out in the sad night air, with the moan of the autumn wind and the dead leaves speaking to me of death, which must come to all.

CHAPTER X.

NINA was sitting by the fire when I entered, for it was so cold and chill with the falling rain which had begun when I left the park, and was now beating against our little window pane.

But I quickly told her all; and then, for the

first time in twenty years, she learned I was not her mother. At first she could scarcely believe, even regretting as I did that she had been told that she had any other parent but myself, until she remembered that she was fitted to be his mate, and that, perhaps, had he known it then, he would have remained true to her to the end; and when I read in her soft velvet eyes what was passing in her mind, a pang of jealousy shot through my heart.

But we had no time to lose, so I made her wrap herself from the cold bleak air, making her walk the side most sheltered from the wind, when we retraced our steps to the Hall. It was but a short half-hour which had elapsed, and yet something told me we were too late.

There was the stillness of death over all, and when we entered within the door was closed noiselessly behind us, and then Sir Charles came forward, his eyes filled with tears, and the hand he held out to Nina shaking visibly.

"It is all over, nurse," he said, and then he led us to a room on the ground-floor.

"The Earl is too overcome with his grief to see you now, my child!" he continued, and then he made her sit down where by the fire it was warm and cheerful. "But your mother confessed all before she died, and in future you must hold the position which is due to my granddaughter."

He paused then, whilst a frightened, scared look came into my darling's eyes, and then she turned to me in an implored tone, whilst she buried her face in her hands.

"Tell him all, mother," she said, "he cannot know," and I could see her cheeks red with shame where it was unhidden by her tiny palms.

Sir Charles looked up.

"Nina, my child," he said, "I know all, but we must not blame the dead. Previous to my daughter's death she not only told me of your relationship to her and myself, but she informed me that you had been secretly married to Arthur Bramsgrove in the name of Norton, all of which had come to her knowledge when she was staying in London—during the time of the marriage of his brother, partly through the innocence of her old nurse, Mrs. Mathews here, and the agency of Marie, whom she employed to worm out the state of affairs from the servants you left behind at Maida Vale—when she resolved, rather than acknowledge you as her daughter, she would raise a stronger barrier between you by allowing you to remain under the impression that the man you believed to be your husband had deceived you and was about to be married to another. The likeness between the two was so great that it the more favoured her scheme, she feeling assured that even Mrs. Mathews had taken the one brother for the other when Lord Arthur, the younger, last visited Brockley."

Nina heard him to the end, and I could see her bosom heave with the agitation she was undergoing, her cheeks ablaze with the colour which had mounted to her temples, whilst her eyes burned in their sockets at the recollection of what she had suffered.

Then after awhile,—

"And she was my mother!" she said. "Oh! take me away—take me away!" and then she turned to me, gasping as though she could not breathe beneath the same roof where the dead woman lay who had wrought her such wrong.

But the door had opened now, she in her misery thinking alone of rushing from the place which had ever known her who had so blighted her young life, when two strong arms were opened to receive her.

She raised her eyes so full of agony for one moment to his, and then she fell senseless on the shoulder of her husband.

He had been sent for at the last, when he heard from the lips of the dying Countess such as, whilst it raised hopes in his breast of again seeing the girl he so fondly loved, filled him with disgust for her who could have acted such a part; at the same time that he blamed himself that he should have been so blinded as never to have insisted on seeking Nina, and hearing from her own lips why she had forsaken him.

But many years have passed since, when,

but a few days after, Helen, Countess of Endscliffe was laid in her narrow bed; and notwithstanding her faults I found my tears falling so fast that they were spoiling the wreath of autumn flowers which with my own old hands I had made for my last offering to the girl I once loved.

I could never think of her but as that, although Nina, now a lady in her own right, was over twenty, and I had lived to see the third generation.

I have not much to stay for now, for my eyes are so dim I can but with difficulty see the green fields and the waving corn, and I feel weary; for all are gone now—even Carlo, who was with me, my sole friend, until one day he licked my hand for the last time, and died at my feet.

So I have put my house in readiness, locking in my drawer the little things I most prized—a lock of hair, silky and fine, from a baby's head, a tiny shoe, and the last treasure, a bouquet of flowers white as the driven snow, with bits of green between, of delicate maidenhair fern, given me when Nina—my Nina—was married, Sir Charles giving her away, and she became Lady Arthur Bramagrove.

But it is all past now, and I look at an old picture. It is John's as he used to be, when I was nurse up at the Hall, and pray for the time to come when we may be again together.

[THE END.]

FRESH proofs are reported to have been discovered of the existence of an ancient civilization in Mexico. In Sonora, about sixty miles south-east of the town of Madeleine, some explorers have found in the heart of a virgin forest a pyramid which is 4,350 feet round the base and 750 feet high—that is to say, nearly double the size of the great pyramid of Cheops. From the base to the summit there is a roadway on which vehicles can travel round the vast erection in a spiral. The outside walls are built of granite blocks carefully tooled and bedded. A little further off is a hillock, with hundreds of caverns or chambers cut in it, from five to fifteen feet wide and ten to fifteen feet long. They have no windows, and are entered by the roof. The walls are covered with hieroglyphics and curious pictures with the feet and hands of men. Some utensils have also been found there. Who the builders of these ancient monuments were is still unsettled, but, according to El Liberal, they probably belonged to Mayos, who formerly inhabited Sonora, and were a different race from the Indians, having blue eyes, a white skin, and blonde hair.

THE water of an aquarium should be aerated thoroughly at least once a day. To accomplish this a glass or hand rubber syringe is necessary. If a green film begins to gather on the side of the tank that is most exposed to the light, it should be cleared away every day, and the sides of the glass polished carefully. A small piece of clean sponge tied on the end of a stick will answer the purpose. It is best to have only small fish in your aquarium. Goldfish and minnows are very good, and the common little sun-fish or "pumpkin-seed" is excellent. You must keep careful watch over the fish in your aquarium, and if any of them appear to be sick they should be removed at once very gently with the hand-net, and placed in fresh water, where he will often recover. Certain varieties of snails live well in fresh water, and will be found useful in clearing away the green film that is almost certain to collect on the side of the glass; but you must be careful or they will devour your plants as well; and if your tank is very small it is hardly worth while to try and keep them. You must be careful not to overstock your aquarium, for fish will not thrive if they are overcrowded. Remember, also, that heat and dust are fatal to your pets. The water must be kept clean and cool at all times, and all foreign matter and every particle of decaying vegetation should be removed immediately.

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

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CHAPTER XIII.

META's engagement was a great source of delight to her father and mother, but they decided as once that it must be kept secret for the present, out of respect to Nina's memory, and the wedding certainly could not take place before another year had passed.

In vain Godfrey Somerville alternately entreated or stormed. One word from him was generally enough to upset their firmest convictions, but on this point, for his own sake as well as Meta's, they thought it wrong to give way. What would the world say if he concealed himself for Nina's loss in less than two years after she was laid in the grave, and Meta stopped off her place at once, as if she were glad to be rid of her?

Godfrey fretted and fumed, and Nella aggravated him by laughing triumphantly.

"I know you are pleased as Punch," he said, sullenly, "but I can't conceive why."

"Can't you?" her eyes twinkling mischievously. "I am very fond of Meta."

"I don't see that that has anything to do with it" leaning in at the window as he was very fond of doing when either of the girls was in the boudoir.

"If your dearest friend were condemned to be hanged, wouldn't you be thankful for a reprieve?"

"Of course I should. A fellow's life is generally safe enough after a reprieve. They never carry out the sentence."

"Exactly."

"And you mean to say"—speaking very slowly—"that you don't wish this to be carried out!"

She nodded, and then quietly went on with her sketch.

"Upon my word you are the coolest hand I ever met," taking the cigar out of his mouth and staring.

"I should be still cooler if you would go away from the window, and not keep out the little air there is."

"Most people would think you wanted the chance for yourself."

"Not most. There are a good many in the world who are not idiots."

"What other reason could you have?" pulling his moustaches, reflectively.

"Half a hundred. I've given you one simile or parable, I'm not quite sure which it is; and now I'll give you another. If I saw a friend of mine on the point of jumping over a precipice, I should be glad if she consented to put it off till the next day, because somebody would be sure to take measures to prevent it."

"Do you mean to take measures to stop our marriage?"

"Oh, dear no! Please don't scowl like that, you make me nervous."

"What then?"

"I think the evil may cure itself."

"I don't understand."

"I shall live in hopes of something turning up."

"You are very enigmatical. Perhaps you think I have another wife?" with a scornful smile.

"Perhaps I do," looking him full in the face, "in that gloomy old tower!"

The colour rushed into his cheeks. He muttered an oath, and stamped his foot savagely.

"Didn't you swear never to mention it?"

"To anyone else? Yes."

"I won't have you talk of it at all," lowering his voice, and looking nervously over his shoulder.

"How can you prevent it?" leaning back in her chair, with an air of cool indifference.

"I will tell you!" He put his head into the room so that she might not fail to hear him, although he spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"You must be no wiser than a baby not to know that your character is in my hands. When a girl meets a man in a lonely place, out of sight of prying eyes, and stays there for an hour or

two, such assignations are not considered too respectable. Who would believe that the meeting was not by appointment, that the delay was voluntary, that the result certainly was not less than stolen kisses?"

"Thank you for warning me!" She rose from her seat, her eyes flashing, but her cheeks as white as her handkerchief. "I will go as once to Sir Edward Somerville, and tell him how I got there by accident, and only stayed because I had no means of getting away. I think anyone would believe that I should not have stayed with you if I could help it."

"Only unfortunately"—with a cold sneer—"you have sworn not to say one word about it. Anyone would have believed you of course! You are too old, too sensible, to have any thoughts of love in your head—and I am a grey-haired old man with no eyes to appreciate a pretty face, even it were but a few inches from my nose!"

"Oh, I hate you! I hate you!" she cried, with a sudden sob, as she saw the trap into which she had walked blindfold.

"Thank Heaven you do! Hate me as much as you like, it makes it all so much easier; but don't attempt to interfere with me or it shall be the worse for you!"

Her bosom was heaving with a tempest of passion; but she tried to keep it in, fearing that the whole future of her life was hanging in balance.

She put her hand to her forehead, as if endeavouring to collect her thoughts; and Godfrey Somerville, standing just opposite to her, was led away from his dreams of vengeance by involuntary admiration for the unconscious grace of her girlish figure.

From the crown of her golden head to the soles of her delicate little feet there was not a flaw in Eleanor Maynard's beauty. It gave her a power over man, which, for the first time, it struck her that she might use for her own benefit.

"Mr. Somerville," she said, with her sweetest smile, "we are wrong to quarrel. Is there any real reason why we cannot be friends?"

"A good many," he stammered, completely taken aback by her change of manner.

"Then suppose we put them on one side. It is unchristian to live under the same roof snarling at each other, like a couple of dogs, from morning till night."

"I never snarl unless you do," he said, moodily, though his eyes brightened.

"And I am going to give it up for the present," holding out her hand.

He stepped forward to take it. It was a lovely little hand, soft as velvet—the mere touch of it made the blood go faster in his veins.

"What do you want to get out of me?" he said, with a dubious smile, as he held it fast.

"Must every woman be mercenary?" she asked, reproachfully.

"But you said just now that you hated me."

"Because you deserved it."

"And don't I deserve it now?"

"You are not going to——"

"I won't release you from your oath," still distrustful of this sudden urbanity.

"Of course not! I couldn't expect it! And, after all, what does it matter, if I may tell one person the truth?"

"But you mayn't."

"Only a person who has no interest in you or yours!" trying to draw away her hand.

"Not a soul."

"Just one, Godfrey!" leaning forward, entreatingly, and using his Christian name as a trump card.

His lip quivered, he could not help softening, because she looked so bewitching, with this new sweetness in her eyes.

"Who is it?"

"Only my cousin"—she faltered—"Cyril Vere."

"Cyril Vere!"—his face darkening—"the last man on earth! I believe at the present moment he is doing his best to ruin me."

"Impossible—he wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Possibly not; but he might have no compunction about a man."

"Why should he want to injure you?"

"For the sake of that heiress whom he is hankering after."

"Miss Arkwright? I don't understand."

"No, and you never will. It is an old story," his brows drawing together. "The less it is talked of the better. But look here, Nell," she winced at the sound of her own name, and he saw it; "if you will give up that stuck-up prig I will never do you a bad turn, whatever the temptation."

"He never was mine, so I could not give him up, even if I would."

"Would you, if you could?" darting a sudden glance straight into her eyes.

The long lashes fell.

"It is no use saying what I would do under imaginary circumstances."

"The future must always be imaginary. Will you promise to refuse him if he pops?"

"No-no. What could it matter to you?"

"Nothing, but I should like to know."

"Next year you will be the husband of Miss Somerville. How can you care if I am married or single?"

"Mad, isn't it? And yet I do care," smiling, as he stepped a few inches closer.

She shot a quick glance at the door, as if to make sure that her retreat was safe.

"I dare say I shall never marry at all."

"So much the better. I should always detect your husband. Nella, is this humbug, or are we to hate each other no more?" looking down at her with glowing eyes.

"No humbug, if you will let me do as I wish."

"What is that?"

"Just let me tell him, and no one else." Again she stooped towards him, a smile on her lovely lips, her eyes soft and entreating.

"Never! Oh Heaven, I can't help it!" and casting all scruples aside, he stretched out his arms as if to draw her towards him.

But in an instant she was at the door. Standing there, her face white with anger and disappointment, she looked over her shoulder with cold contempt,

"You are a mean, dishonourable wretch, and the friendship that I offered you you shall never have. For the future, remember that my name is Miss Maynard."

Then she swept out of the room, with her head in the air, and he was left in the middle of the carpet, looking after her with dazed eyes.

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy!" she cried, as, after locking her door, she knelt down by the side of her bed and sobbed like a child.

The clouds were gathering round her, and she felt dismayed; for was she not in the power of a man whom no one could move either to pity or generosity?

If he chose to stand between her and Cyril Vere, he would; and no mortal on earth would induce him to step on one side.

She had a letter from Cyril in her pocket.

From its tone it was evident that some breath of scandal had already reached his ears. And she must let her best friend go from her, because her tongue was tied.

It was maddening, but none could help her. For his sake she had humiliated herself to a man whom she loathed, and it had been of no use. There was nothing to be done but to wait with patience for the end, and pray to Heaven for protection from the danger that threatened her on earth.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I HAVEN'T been to a ball for such ages that I shall scarcely know how to behave," said Meta Somerville. "I think as Godfrey is so fond of red, I shall wear crimson camellias. You must have something red to please him with your white dress."

"Fortunately, kind Lady Somerville has given me the most exquisite set of *Gloires de Dijon*."

"I'm so sorry, because Godfrey won't like it."

"I don't think it matters much."

"Perhaps not, but it is my wish to please him in everything."

"Naturally; but you are going to marry him, and not I."

"Still you might be friends."

"Who said we were not?"

"Anyone could see it for themselves."

"My dear child, what would you like me to do?"

"You needn't be always quarrelling."

"I have dropped that lately, and I treat him with the greatest politeness."

"Yes, so nicely polite that it is enough to freeze him."

"Which perfectly accords with the weather. However they can expect any sport to-morrow I can't conceive."

"What time is Mr. Vere to arrive?"

"Half-past six," her eyes dancing with joy. "I wonder what his friend Mr. Mallon is like. It was so delightful of Lady Somerville to ask him as well."

"Mr. Vere gave us to understand that we should not get him without his *fides Achates*. I suppose when two men come over together from Ireland like that they consider themselves bound not to separate."

"The strange thing is that I never heard of him before."

"Can't Mr. Vere have a friend whom you don't know?"

"Scarcely," with a smile. "I think I used to know them all, at least by name. But I mustn't waste any more time as I have got to see after the flowers."

With a light step she hurried away, and met Godfrey Somerville on the stairs.

"Are you going to ride to-morrow?" stopping straight in front of her.

"I am."

"Do you intend to do more than go to the meet?"

"I intend to follow as close to the hounds as my horse will take me."

"Will you trust me to give you a lead?"

"Yes, when I want to go to destruction; but that won't be to-morrow."

And with a little nod she managed to pass him, and ran downstairs.

"That depends," he muttered to himself, as he slowly continued his way to the second floor. "If I chose to begin to-night," he concluded, with a shrug of his shoulders, as he reached his own door.

Nella was too happy to worry herself about him. With the elasticity of youth she had recovered her spirits long ago, and, secure in her own innocence, cast her fears to the wind. There was not a brighter face in Blankshire than hers, as she bent it over the flowers which she was arranging in a number of quaintly-cut glass vases for the dinner-table.

Lady Somerville, who had grown very fond of her, watched her with a kindly smile.

"You have put in different colours to usual," she remarked presently, "but they look so pretty that no one ought to complain."

"I am so tired of the eternal red geranium. These creamy roses with the dark leaves look over so much prettier."

"Only Godfrey is so fond of the other."

"Don't you think you spoil him rather, Lady Somerville?" Inwardly marvelling at her own audacity.

"Perhaps we do. But only think of what he has lost!" dropping her knitting, and looking out of the window with dreamy eyes. "How can we ever make up to him for it?"

"I should think Meta would more than do that," said Nella, with a pout.

"She is a dear, good girl, but she is not like our Lima. And then Godfrey has been through so much sorrow in the course of his life that we all feel we must do our best to afford him a little sunshine."

"Any sorrow before the last?"

"Yes, my dear. I don't suppose there is any harm in telling you," looking round, as if to be sure that the room was empty. "He had a sister whom he was devotedly fond of. When their father and mother died these two lived together in the old place in Devonshire, and were like, people said, two love-birds in the same cage. One could do nothing without the other. If he

went out shooting or hunting she was obliged to go too, though she hated to see a bird hurt, and she was nothing of a horse-woman."

"And did she die?" asked Nella, her face full of sympathy.

"Walt a bit, my dear. They went on like this for several years, and no one could have been a better brother than Godfrey; but, unfortunately, a brother cannot long be everything to a woman, and when he found this out he did not like it. A young man named Victor Maltavers—"

"Victor Maltavers? I knew I had heard that name before!"

"Very likely. Only a few years ago it was in everybody's mouth. He came to stay with an uncle of his close to Combe Grove, and the young people were always meeting in the woods or on the water. He was a very nice, gentlemanly young man, and when he was staying with us Lima took a great fancy to him, and Godfrey, I think, was jealous. However, there was nothing in it, for Mr. Maltavers was soon afterwards engaged to Miss Arkwright, and everyone was looking forward to the wedding as the greatest event of the year."

"And what stopped it?" eagerly.

"When the wedding day came Victor Maltavers was in prison."

"In prison?"

"Yes," said Lady Somerville, "for the murder of Robina Somerville!"

The rose which she was holding fell on to the floor.

"But it wasn't true!"

"I think not. In fact, I am sure he never did it. He had the kindest, most winning manners; and even to an old lady like me he did not think it too much trouble to make himself agreeable. Poor Dulcie Arkwright, it nearly broke her heart."

"Miss Arkwright, the heiress?" exclaimed Nella, breathlessly, as a new hope shot across her heart.

"Yes, my dear. Much good it does her to be an heiress, when the only thing she cares for is taken from her."

"Then you think she will never marry!" as she thought of Cyril Vere.

"Not unless Mr. Maltavers is cleared."

"But how did it happen? Do tell me."

"No one knows. In November he was down in Devonshire, and one foggy afternoon Robina met him on the cliff. Some say it was by appointment. He said it was by accident. I dare say he flirted with her, for she was an exceedingly pretty girl, and perhaps the poor thing thought he meant more than he did. Godfrey was obliged to confess that she was madly in love with him, and that he hurried down to Devonshire on purpose to tell her of Mr. Maltavers's engagement before she could meet him. When he arrived he was told that she had gone up the cliff—remember this is his own account—and he followed, fearing that some accident might happen to her, because the fog was so thick."

"And he found her!"

"He found nothing, only a gun which belonged to Mr. Maltavers; and from that day to this Robina has never been seen."

"Extraordinary! What can he have done with her?"

"Victor could do nothing, for he was arrested at once; but the charge could not be proved for want of sufficient evidence, and he was discharged. But his life was blighted. They say he would rather have been hanged than cast aside with this horrible suspicion hanging over his head. He had to sell out—to give up his friends—in his betrothal, and everything that made life worth having—and remain an outcast from society for the rest of his days."

"And yet you think he is innocent!" said Nella, wondering.

"Perhaps it is foolish of me, but I do," said Lady Somerville, with a sad smile. "There is a mystery about the whole case which is so strange. It was half-past three when Godfrey went up the cliff to look for his sister, but the servants said that it was twelve o'clock at night before he came back and told them to bring lanterns and begin the search."

"That was curious! What could he have been doing all the while? It was enough to turn his brain, and perhaps that is why he is so very odd sometimes."

"Odd, my dear! I don't understand you," said Lady Somerville, stiffly. "Godfrey suffers from low spirits, and has an uncertain temper; but I am thankful to say that there is not the slightest suspicion of madness in the family, or I would not let him have my child! There is nothing I have a greater horror of. Before he was engaged to my poor Lina I had a long conversation with him on the subject and he was able to satisfy me on that point entirely. Not one of his relations had ever suffered from mental delusions except his grandfather, who lived to ninety-two, and was childish."

"Here they are!" cried Nella, excitedly. "I heard the dog-cart drive up to the door!"

"Oh, dear! and these flowers look so dreadfully untidy!"

"If you wouldn't mind helping me to put them on this tray, I think I could carry them into the dining-room. Perhaps, after all, they won't come in here!"

With Lady Somerville's assistance the vases were all collected on the tray, and Nella slipped with them through a side door, just as the two gentlemen were ushered in by the butler.

When she came back her heart was beating fast, and the colour came and went in her cheeks.

For a minute she hesitated with her hand on the handle of the door, and then at the sound of her cousin's well-known voice she opened it hastily.

How straight, and tall, and handsome he looked as he stood before his hostess, the sun shining through the window on his yellow hair!

He turned at the sound of the opening door, his whole face lighted up with sudden pleasure, and the next moment her hand was grasped in his, and his blue eyes looking straight into hers.

A sudden unaccountable feeling of shyness came over her, and she collapsed upon the sofa.

Then he introduced his friend, whom she had been too much preoccupied to notice—a slight man of average height, with fine dark eyes, yellowish complexion, shaggy red hair, whiskers and moustaches.

There was some peculiarity in the shape of his shoulders, and his back projected just below his neck in such a manner as almost to produce the effect of a hump.

Altogether Mr. Verreker Mallon was far from being an Adonis, and Nella, after a few slight speeches, turned with a sense of relief to her cousin.

He sat down on the sofa by her side, leaving his friend to talk to his hostess, letting his eyes rest on her with a well-pleased glance, as if it were a delight to him to be once more in her presence.

All her doubts and fears were forgotten, and she felt brimming over with happiness.

Then the door opened, and in walked Sir Edward and his nephew. After greeting the guests and uttering a few commonplaces, Godfrey came up to the sofa where Nella was sitting, with a beautiful crimson rose in his hand.

"I did not forget you," he said, with a smile, as he threw it into her lap; "you must reward me by wearing it this evening!"

In an instant she saw a cloud gather on Cyril's open countenance, and she felt inclined to throw it back in Somerville's face.

He had never picked her a flower before. What could be his motive now?

"Thanks," she said, coolly, as she rose from her seat; "I will take it to Meta!"

"Meta has her own flowers! That was gathered for you! Come, you never refused me before!" following her to the door.

"Because you never tried me!"

"Oh, no; of course not!" in a tone that implied daily offerings at least, and to her surprise he opened the door for her with unaccustomed politeness, stopping on the threshold to wave his hand to her as she went upstairs.

CHAPTER XV.

THAT evening Nella placed a knot of yellow roses in her breast. The one that Somerville had presented to her was intentionally left in a glass of water. She would not let it die because it was lovely; she would not wear it because he had given it to her.

Down the corridor which led to what were called the "bachelor's rooms" Cyril Vere and his friend were talking instead of preparing themselves for dinner. Mr. Mallon was sitting in a lounging chair, his elbows on his knees, his fingers buried in his long hair.

"I wouldn't have come if I had known that fellow was here," he said, disconsolately. "He'll spy me out for a certainty. I think I had better pretend 'sudden business' and retire at once."

"Nonsense!" said Vere, energetically. "How can you lose courage, when in a few days the game may be in your own hands. Even the meet to-morrow is just as if it were planned on purpose for us. If the wind doesn't change the fox is sure to head towards Deepden, and there are nine chances to one that he takes us past the very place we want to have a look at. Cheer up, old fellow, and make yourself presentable as soon as you can."

"Presentable!" with a wry face, as he pulled his shaggy beard.

"Well, unpresentable if you like," laughing cheerily. "You look rather like a Yankee adventurer run to seed."

"None of your chaff. I say, Vere, your cousin is the prettiest little thing I've seen for a long time. I couldn't stand Somerville being sweet on her if I were you."

"I fancy he is looking out for his own cousin—not mine."

"Ah! playing a double game; just the sort of thing to suit him. Heigho! I think I shall choke at the first mouthful I eat if I sit next to him at table. I suppose I must put on a white tie, though no one can see it under this confounded beard. Have you made my dress coat look just the same as this?" turning to his valet.

"Yes, sir; I've put in just the same amount of cotton wool, and I think you will say the effect is excellent."

"I suppose I may wash my face?"

"Ever so slightly, sir. I wouldn't do more than just dab it with the water or the colouring come off, let alone the eyebrows."

"Are the horses all right? Brown Bear didn't fancy the horse-box."

"But she was as quiet as a lamb after the first start. George went to look after her at every station. Which scent shall I put on your handkerchief?"

"None! Oh, good Heavens! fancy a satyr indulging in perfumes! Is that the gong? Now, Rivers, on your oath, if you had met me in Regent-street, should you have known me?"

"Not if so be my life had depended on it, sir," returned the valet, promptly; and, thus encouraged, his master made up his mind to descend the stairs, and face the world.

Sir Edward took in Nella. Mr. Mallon gave his arm to his hostess, Cyril Vere fell to the lot of Meta, and Godfrey had to go into dinner alone.

"Where is my rose?" he said to Nella, as, to her disgust, he took his seat beside her.

"On my table."

"Why did you not wear it?"

"Partly because it would not go with my dress."

"An idle excuse!"

"Why did you give it me?"

"Perhaps because I knew you wouldn't like it!"

"I thought so."

"A crimson rose means all sorts of tender things!"

"That depends upon the giver."

"When I give it to you its meaning is——"

"Mallon prepense," she said, quickly.

"Mallon might have gone to sleep if you had worn it," with a slow smile. "Meta," looking across the table, "have you told Mr. Vere of the narrow escape Miss Meynard had the day that he called?"

Cyril looked up quickly, and a vivid distracting blush covered Nella with confusion as their eyes met.

"Oh! no; I forgot that he had never heard of it."

And Meta obediently launched forth into an interesting narrative of Limerick's escapades.

Nella sat on thorns, whilst Godfrey, as if bent on doing all the mischief that he could, kept regarding her with covert glances of amusement.

"And when she recovered sufficiently to walk Godfrey took her to the inn—the 'Red Plough-share'—and there they were kept prisoners till the storm was over."

"There is another house about a mile and a half further down the road," said Vere, gravely; "perhaps they took refuge there."

"Oh, no," she exclaimed, in surprise, "if they had they would have told us. Why should you doubt their being at the inn?"

"One reason is"—with an emphasis on the "one" that Nella noticed with a sinking heart—"I was there myself for the best part of an hour."

"And you didn't see them? How strange!"

"Not at all," said Godfrey, promptly. "We did not sit all the time with the doors wide open, that every beggar who happened to come to the door might watch us drink our tea."

"It seems to have been a day for misfortunes," and Cyril looked across at Nella, sternly, as if determined to show her that she could not baffle him; "for whilst I was there the dog-cart was sentinel to pick up another lady who had met with an accident."

"I think it must have been me."

Her voice was hoarse, and her eyes no longer frankly raised to his.

"Then it drove away from the inn without you."

Unable to stand it any longer, she cast an imploring glance at Somerville, who responded to it by leaning over her in the tenderest manner, and whispering,—

"Courage!"

To a casual looker on it was evident that there was a secret understanding between the two, and Vere's face darkened. Open as the day himself, he could not tolerate the slightest attempt at deception.

"Perhaps, Miss Somerville," he said, slowly, "you can tell me who is the owner of that curious-looking place, half-buried amongst the flexes?"

"Indeed I can't; we were only wondering about it the other day. Godfrey, you haven't found out anything more, I suppose?"

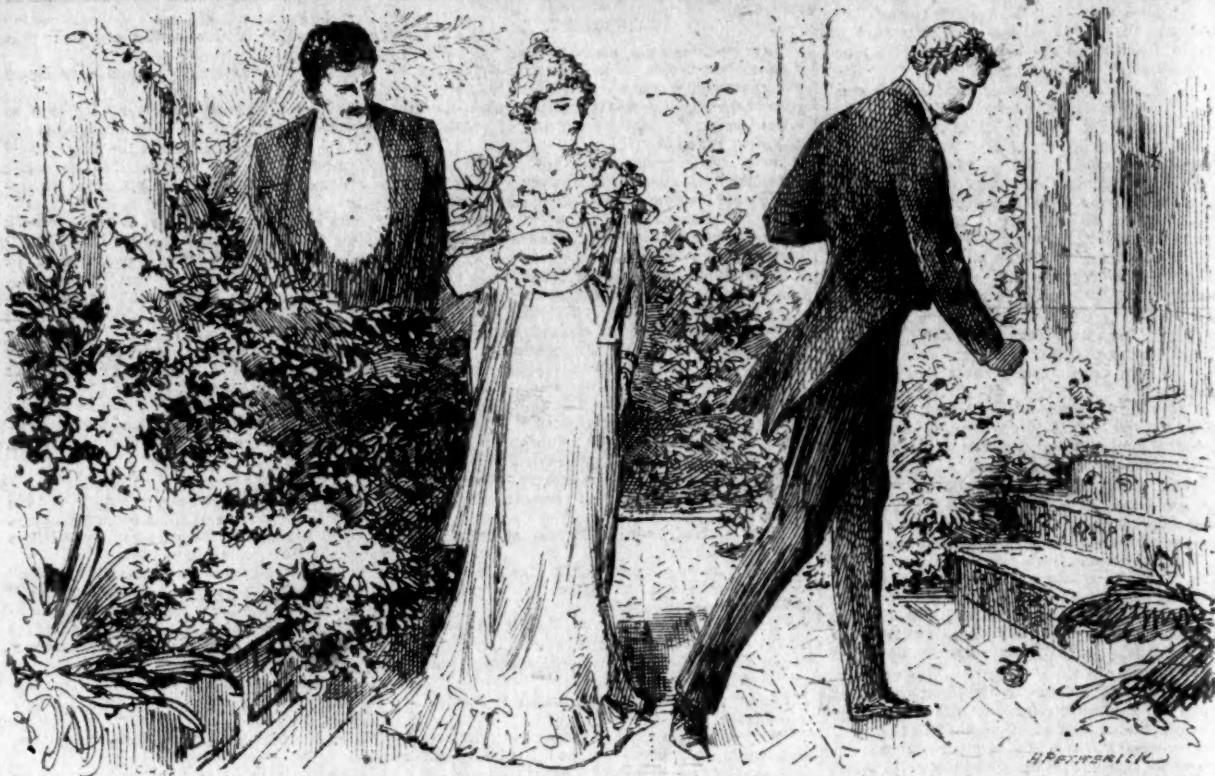
"I made inquiries"—Mr. Mallon was listening intently whilst talking to his hostess—"as you seemed to be dying of curiosity. The owner is an eccentric fellow, who keeps a menagerie there of birds and beasts. He's always away, and so the grounds are much used for romantic interviews, assignations, &c., with a slight smile, for which Vere could have knocked him down, and another covert glance at the girl by his side.

"But you were never inside the gates," said Meta, eagerly; "you told me so yourself."

"Inside the house, I think I said," he replied, guardedly. "Certain that Vere had caught sight of them on their way home, he was afraid of giving a different answer. "Do you think the frost will spoil the sport to-morrow?"

Whether or not the sport was spoilt Nella's pleasure was spoilt that evening. Cyril scarcely spoke another word to her, but looked at the pictures over her head as if he didn't see her. She was thankful when the long dinner was over, hoping that affairs would brighten in the drawing-room.

With true feminine craft she took care to be in the conservatory when the men came out of the dining room, thinking that Cyril would be sure to come to her, and have a talk about old times. She would not turn her head, as somebody's footsteps came nearer and nearer along the tessellated pavement; her heart beat, her lips relaxed into a smile, but she bent over a pot of cyclamens, as if engrossed in examining their snow-white blossoms.



CYRIL VERO DASHED THE ROSE-BUD DOWN ON TO THE PAVEMENT, AND STRODE AWAY.

"Come and sing," said the voice that she hated, and she could have cried aloud in her disappointment. "Meta is flirting for the first time in her life, and there is no one to entertain Mr. Mallon and me."

"Then entertain each other," without deigning to give him even so much as a glance.

"No, I will stay and talk to you if you like it better. Do you know I never saw you look so charming as you do this evening! Did you dress yourself on purpose for Vere? Where are you off to?" as she brushed past him.

"You said that you were going to stay, so I won't."

"Then I will come with you. Your roses are fading," stooping his head as if he wished to smell them.

She stepped aside, and threw back her head naughtily.

"Mr. Somerville, if you do not treat me with proper respect I will appeal to Sir Edward."

"Do, and you will get laughed at for your pains. Do you think that your word would have any weight against mine in this house?"

"At least I will try."

"Nella, dear," and Meta came towards her with Cyril in her wake, "I thought Godfrey was trying to induce you to sing."

"Yes, but Miss Maynard preferred conversation amongst the flowers, so I stayed."

"Or rather solitude which I couldn't get, so came away."

"I want you to show Mr. Vere the Taxonia," said Meta, kindly wishing to throw the cousins together. "He declares he doesn't know what I mean."

"But I am quite willing to take it for granted," as if desirous of avoiding a *tête à tête*.

"It is over there," said Nella, shortly, but condescending to show the way, whilst Meta linked her arm in Godfrey's, and led him back to the drawing-room.

Cyril followed with his head up in the air, as if he had no eye but for the creepers on the roof.

"There, that is the Taxonia," pointing to the crimson blossoms dangling their long tassels above their heads.

"Oh, that is it!" surveying it critically, as if it were of far more interest than the girl who was standing opposite to him in the flower of her beauty.

"Cyril!" she exclaimed, passionately, "what have I done!"

A quiver of emotion passed over his features as he turned his head and looked at her.

"I think you know better than I do; is there any use in discussing it?"

"I don't know. I am just the same as I was at Elstone, only you are different."

"Just the same! Oh, no!" shaking his head.

"When you were at Elstone you were as simple and innocent as the day, and I was proud"—his deep voice trembled—"proud to think I was almost your brother."

"And now!" her face was very pale—her eyes wide and frightened.

"And now," with a laugh, utterly unlike his own. "I am quite satisfied to be your cousin."

Her lips quivered, and she stepped back as if she had been struck.

"You—you are very courteous."

"I am frank," he said, firmly, though his heart had nearly failed him; "I only wish I could say the same for you."

"I never deceived you in my life," raising her head, and looking him full in the face.

"No; but it was not for the want of trying. When I was at Elstone you twisted me round your finger, but here I have seen with my own eyes, and I have heard with my own ears enough already to tell me over and over again that my love for you was a folly of which I had better cure myself as soon as I can."

The veins in his forehead were swollen, and his eyes dashed with resentful fire.

"But why—only tell me why!" clasp'ng her hands imploringly.

"Why should I tell you? you know it. Come, Nella," his manner changing, "don't try to hum-

bug me, it is no use. Make a clean breast of it, if you like."

"And so I will!" she exclaimed, eagerly; "only tell me what you think I've done, and I shall be so glad to say it isn't true. Not that I wish you to like me particularly," looking down at her roses, and blushing. "I've seen you with Miss Arkwright, and—"

"You saw me, when?"

"At that ruined abbey, I forgot its name; I saw you both together, and you kissed her hand!"

"Did I? I don't remember it, and I had no idea you were looking on," with a slight smile.

"I remember seeing you, and I stole your rose."

"Yes, and you gave it to Miss Arkwright."

"That I swear I didn't. I dropped it, and would have gone back to look for it only I was afraid they would chaff."

"And you didn't give it to her!" her face brightening.

"No; anything of yours, Nella, I have always kept," the old look coming back into his eyes.

"Will you keep this," holding out a rose-bud, "and when you look at it remember that I have never changed!"

He took it, and smiled down into her face, his own full of tenderness, his eyes grave and very wistful.

"No, Nella," as he took it in his hand, "I can never remember that."

"Is that the rose you promised me?" said Godfrey Somerville, who had come into the conservatory without being heard by either. "Everything 'under the rose' has a charm for me."

Remembering to what the words alluded, Cyril Vero dashed the rose-bud down on to the pavement, and walked away without another glance at Nella.

(To be continued.)



HAIDÉE WAS HALF-WAY ALONG THE PASSAGE WHEN A FIGURE STEPPED FROM BEHIND A BRONZE STATUE.

REDEEMED BY FATE.

—:—

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANWHILE, pleasant companion as Philip was—and she had danced with him principally because he seemed lonely, and knew no one else—Muriel was very much regretting having engaged herself for the cotillion, for instead of enjoying the dance her eyes were constantly roving about the room in search of her husband and Sybil, and bitter was her disappointment when she failed to see them enter.

Had not Philip himself been engrossed in watching Haidée and Sir Jasper, he must have observed his partner's preoccupation; but, as it was, it escaped his notice.

"Shall I get you an ice?" he said, when the set was over and he led her to a seat in a window recess, where lace draperies shut her out from observation, and the night air blew coolly and refreshingly in through the open casement.

"If you please!" she answered; and then he went away, and Lady Urwick's thoughts wandered off to those few minutes when she had stood in the starlight by her husband's side, while a happy smile parted her scarlet lips.

Presently she heard her own name mentioned, and started up, intending to make her presence known to the little knot of gentlemen who had gathered outside the recess; but before she could put her resolve in execution her ear caught words that seemed to take all volition from her.

"It's really too bad of Urwick," said Captain Wildair; "he has been sitting out on the terrace with Miss Ruthven for the last half-hour, and a moment's thought would convince him of the folly of giving people's tongues such food for scandal!"

"Downright insult to that charming wife of his, I call it!" put in another voice. "I wonder she stands it so quietly!"

"Perhaps she knows nothing about his former

liaison with the fair Sybil!" suggested someone else.

"Oh, yes! You may be sure there have been plenty of kind friends to enlighten her on a subject that was the talk of the whole country. Everyone knows how devoted he used to be to Miss Ruthven, and that he would have married her if his debts had not prevented it."

"Then I suppose the attraction of the present Lady Urwick was her money?"

"Certainly, that's the reason Urwick made her his wife! But be that as it may, she is thoroughbred to the backbone, and he ought to treat her with proper respect—which certainly does not consist in flirting with Miss Ruthven!"

"I wonder she has not more prudence!"

The only answer to this remark was a shrug, very significant of the estimation in which Sybil was held; and then the trio moved away, leaving in the recess an anguished, white-faced woman, whose heart was crying out in wild appeal to Heaven against the hardness of her fate.

So it was Sybil whom Claud had loved—nay, loved still; and all the softening in his manner, the interest he was beginning to manifest in her, was nothing but a fancy born of her own vanity.

True, she herself had been aware of the motive for which Urwick had married her, but it was none the less bitterly humiliating to hear it spoken of, and to know it was common talk for all the county.

She could have cried aloud in her wounded spirit, her bitter mortification; but pride came to her aid, and she rose up, drawing her graceful figure to its full height, while her eyes flashed and her lips curled in haughtiest scorn.

"I will be no coward for them to triumph over me and glory in my pain!" she said to herself, resolutely. "They shall never know that I care, or that a two-edged sword thrust in my bosom would have been less terrible than this!"

She came out of the recess and met Philip with the ice in his hand. Her cheeks were flushed red as a pomegranate flower, and the face

of Haidée herself was not wreathed with more radiant smiles.

"I have changed my mind—I don't want the ice," she said, gaily; "but if you will give me your arm we will go out on the terrace and promenade for a while."

He immediately offered it, and just as they were leaving the ball-room they met Lord Urwick and Sybil coming in.

Muriel affected not to notice them, and continued her laughing conversation with Philip; but a dark frown came on the brow of the Viscount, who, after conducting Sybil to a seat, followed his wife out.

"Muriel, can I speak with you a minute?"

"Is it anything particular?" she asked, carelessly, and apparently not inclined to put an end to her *tête à tête*. "Will it not do by-and-by?"

"It is something particular, and it will not do by-and-by!" he said, sternly; and Philip, wondering at the tone in which the words were spoken, resigned the lady's arm and retired, so as to be out of earshot.

"Well!" said Muriel, interrogatively, but in a very uninterested voice, as she busied herself with the fastening of one of her bracelets.

"Do you know you are making yourself conspicuous by your imprudent conduct!" exclaimed Claud, not finding his task such an easy one as he had anticipated, now that he was face to face with the delinquent.

"My imprudent conduct!" opening her eyes, and laughing, "I don't know what you mean."

"You have danced three times with Mr. Greville."

"Well, and suppose I had danced thirteen times with him—what then?"

"What then? I wonder you have not more sense of propriety than to ask such a question. Why, you will have the whole neighbourhood talking of you!"

"In that case the worst it could say would be that you and I were well matched," she answered, with a delicate satire that stung him all the more

because it was uttered with such tranquil indifference.

He bit his lip, and frowned.

"Is that all you wanted me for?" she added, after a slight pause. "If so, permit me to tell you it was hardly important enough to warrant the interruption of such a pleasant conversation as mine with Mr. Greville."

"Really, your partiality for that young man is surprising. No doubt, though, you find a similarity of taste," said the Viscount, with a sneer; but, for all that, I must remind you of a fact you have apparently forgotten, namely, that you have a position to keep up, and that the name you bear has certain responsibilities."

"I am not likely to forget it—no more likely than a slave is to forget the chains that bind her," she replied, very bitterly. "This is the badge of my servitude"—throwing out her left hand, and pointing to the broad band of gold on the third finger.

Lord Urwickie stared at her in amazement. Was this the quiet, reserved creature he had married—the calm, icy woman who had sat at the head of his table, never contradicting one of his mandates, never troubling him with complaints or recriminations? Why, she looked a very empress, whose majesty has been insulted; and instead of the humble penitent he had expected to see, murmuring her regrets at having committed an unwitting breach of the laws of society, he found she did not even condescend to take so much notice of his rebuke as to reply to it—she let it pass in contemptuous silence, whilst she threw in his face the fact of her marriage being hateful to her!

What had caused the change, and gives her such courage?

He was silent, for the simple reason that he was too dumbfounded to know what to say; and Muriel, with a mocking bow, turned away, the silks and lace of her dress sweeping past him on the marble of the terrace, whilst she beckoned Philip towards her, and returned on his arm to the ball-room.

Lord Urwickie paced up and down, more agitated than he had been for many a long day.

"And I fancied she cared for me!" he muttered, and then stood still, while the small still voice of conscience whispered in his ear,—

"Well, and suppose she did care for you, how have you repaid her? By a scornful indifference, a systematic neglect. What have you given her in return for her old girlish freedom of thought and action? An empty title for which she cares nothing. Is it then wonderful that she should find solace in the attentions of another man?"

"She knew him, and perhaps cared for him before our marriage," he muttered, fiercely, recalling their adieu at South Kensington, which his own presence had interrupted, and the fact that it was through her influence Philip was now here. "Well, I will wait and see what time brings forth, and if I find they are lovers—"

He was not quite clear what would be the result, but a hot hatred of Philip began to grow up in his heart, and he tried in vain to check it. He went indoors, but did not dance again that night, except once with Sybil.

On all sides he heard praises of his wife, who had contrived, without any effort on her own part, to become the rage, which means much more than saying she was merely a beauty. Certainly her looks did not betray any unhappiness, for of the gay she was the gayest, laughter sparkled in her eyes and on her lips, and her movements were the lightest and the most buoyant of all the guests who honoured Sir Jasper that night with their presence!

"Is not this a delightful evening!" murmured Haldéé to Philip, between the pauses of their visits. "I have so enjoyed it!"

"It's more than I have then," answered the young man; "for if it had not been for Lady Urwickie, who took pity on me, I should have been left out in the cold—to find my own level, I suppose!"

"Don't speak so bitterly, Philip."

"Is it not enough to make me feel bitter, when I see you engrossed by Sir Jasper, and

half-a-dozen others, while I dare not approach within a hundred yards of you?"

"You are somewhere within that distance now, at all events," said Haldéé, somewhat archly, and thinking that perhaps her lover had some small cause of complaint.

"Yes; but this is the first dance I have had with you to-night, and I suppose it will be the last."

"Never mind!" consolingly, "I'll meet you in the china gallery to-morrow night, and then we'll have a long, long talk to make up for this disappointment. By-the-bye, have you some across any traces of those papers yet?"

"No; and the matter remains as great a mystery as ever," said Philip, his brow clouding. "I told Sir Jasper all about it, and asked him if he could throw any light on it; but he said no, and was as much puzzled as I myself. He gave me leave to question the servants, but they all accounted for themselves in a way that was perfectly satisfactory."

"It is strange!" murmured the girl.

"It is more than strange—it is bewildering. And yet, do you know, Haldéé, I have a strange idea—I daresay you will laugh at it as an idle fancy—that the secret of my birth is somehow connected with this place!"

Haldéé did not laugh, but she opened her eyes in wide astonishment.

"And instead of being discouraged by the loss of those letters, I am the more determined to persevere in my efforts to discover who my parents really were," went on the young man. "To-morrow I am going to an auction in London in order to buy a picture Sir Jasper is anxious to have; and I shall take the opportunity of calling on an old friend of mind, who is a barrister. I intend telling him the whole of my history, and asking his advice as to what steps I had better take. Of course I can afterwards exercise my own judgment with regard to following his counsels."

"What counsels, my young Raphael?" said Sir Jasper, lightly, as he came up behind them, and offered his arm to Haldéé. "I fear I must deprive you of Miles Darrall's society, Greville, for supper is served, and I am to have the honour of taking her down."

CHAPTER XV.

DURING the night a change took place in the weather, and morning was ushered in by cloudy skies, and a soft warm drizzle of fine rain.

A dog-cart was brought round to the door of Heathcote Priors before breakfast, and Philip jumped in and drove off to the station, for the sale of which he had spoken was to begin in good time, and the picture Sir Jasper wanted was set down early in the catalogue.

On reaching the auction-rooms where the collection was exhibited he could not refrain a feeling of surprise, for none of the pictures were by any means valuable; and the particular one mentioned by the baronet was of such decided mediocrity that Philip wondered whether it would fetch the cost of his journey!

However, it was not his place to dictate to his patron, so he bought the painting at a low price, paid for it by filling up the blank cheque Sir Jasper had given him, and then took a hansom and drove to Fleet-street, where he got out, and began the ascent of the many steps that led to his legal friend's chambers in Smith's-buildings, Temple.

Mr. Robert Pierson, barrister-at-law, was at home, and received his visitor very cordially. He was a tall, rather slight man, of middle age, with curly hair, worn bald at the forehead, and a wide determined brow. When he spoke his voice was remarkably clear and incisive, and gave you the impression of his words being well-weighed, and worthy of attention.

"What a long time it is since I saw you!" he exclaimed. "I have been wondering where the Dickens you had hidden yourself."

Thereupon Philip gave a slight sketch of the various adventures that had befallen him since Mrs. Maxwell's death—excepting his relations

with Haldéé—and, in conclusion, detailed the mysterious disappearance of the papers on which he laid so much importance.

"Curious—very!" remarked Pierson, leaning his head on his hand, and regarding Philip thoughtfully. "I suppose you are sure you put them in the desk?"

"Positive!"

"And the desk was locked?"

"Yes."

"And have you any reason to suppose your papers were tampered with before, or have been since?"

"To the best of my belief not. However, finding the lock of the desk must have been forced with a skeleton key, I took the precaution afterwards of putting all papers and a diary away in a metal box that it would be a matter of some difficulty to open."

"A very wise proceeding. Now, can you say positively whether the figure you saw was that of a man or a woman?"

Philip hesitated.

"It was that of a tall person wrapped in a cloak, and it seemed to me like a man, but the darkness may possibly have deceived me."

"Because," added Pierson, "if you are convinced it was none of the servants, we have the inquiry narrowed into a radius embracing only three persons—Sir Jasper, his sister, and their guest."

"It was not the latter, because I had just parted from her," said Philip, hastily; "and Miss Rathven, I have every reason to believe, was in her room."

"Then Sir Jasper was undoubtedly the intruder!"

Philip started and was silent. Strangely enough the idea had not occurred to him, but nevertheless it took a strong hold on his imagination.

"Sir Jasper has always struck me as being a man with a secret," he said at last, slowly. "He is studiously silent with regard to his past life, and I confess I have often wished to know something about it."

"Nothing easier," remarked the barrister. "There are ways of getting at the history of all such men as Sir Jasper Rathven, and I will undertake to send you a written account of his early life within seven days."

"But would it be honourable to allow you to do so?"

"Certainly. There is no necessity for any knowledge you may attain to go farther, or to injure the baronet; therefore there can be nothing wrong in it. You simply do it as a means of throwing light on an occurrence that concerns you, and has taken place beneath his roof—the motive fully justifies the means."

"Still," observed Philip, "it seems taking a great deal of trouble, and a very roundabout way of elucidating a trifle."

The barrister smiled.

"My dear Greville, in the legal profession—and you know I was brought up as a solicitor before being called to the bar—we are accustomed to attach great importance to what you are pleased to call 'trifles.' It is the 'trifles' that give us the first clue—'trifles' that aid in following it out—'trifles' that one by one are brought together in the chain of circumstantial evidence, until a pile of proof is built up strong enough to send a man to the gallows. Perhaps out of this very trifles you may be put on the track of the discovery you are so anxious to make regarding your own parentage. And that reminds me of a coincidence in your narrative that struck me as peculiar; but in order to explain it I must give you a few preliminary particulars."

He opened the desk on the writing-table before him, and took from it a letter, which he glanced over before speaking again.

"This," he said, "is from a man in Australia named Seward, who has been out there nearly thirty years, and has contrived to amass a very good fortune. It seems he married and had two children. His wife, however, died, many years ago, and last autumn his children caught a fever, which, in both cases, had a fatal termination. After this sad occurrence he resolved to return

to England, and has been occupied in selling his farm, stock, &c., and his trouble is now to find an heir to the money he has accumulated. When he quitted England he had one sister, of whom he was very fond, and whom he left under the care of an aunt. The name of this girl was Grace, and she was supposed to be very pretty; at all events, she ran away from her home, to be married, presumably, but the companion of her flight was never discovered. She wrote one letter to her brother, saying she was well and happy, and that a child had been born to her, and that was all the news that Matthew Seaforth ever received; for she gave no address, and he was then moving about from place to place, so that, even supposing she had written, the letter would probably not have reached him. The aunt, in the meantime, died; and so for all these years, Seaforth had ceased communicating with his family; but now that he has lost his own children he is anxious to discover whether his sister's are living, and has written to me to make inquiries and spare no expense in the matter. It seems a hopeless chance with as little by way of a clue; nevertheless, I don't despair of success, and I should be very glad to obtain it, for Seaforth once did a very good turn to a brother of mine who was in the Bush, and it is owing to that he has entrusted his business to me. I dare say you are surprised I have troubled you with all these details, but now I will tell you the reason. The place where Grace Seaforth fled from was the village of Heathcliff, the date of her flight was about twelve months before your own birth."

Greville, who had been listening with close attention, started up, very pale and agitated, and laid his hand on the barrister's arm.

"And do you think—I?" he commenced, and then stopped, unable to continue.

"Do I think you are that child?" said Mr. Pierson. "No; it would be premature to say that I did. I simply see a curious coincidence which I deem it worth while investigating, but until some more light is thrown on the subject it would be the height of folly to identify you with Seaforth's nephew. However, I will lose no time in setting inquiries afoot, and, moreover, Seaforth himself will be in England before very long, and then we shall hear what he has to say."

Just then a clerk entered with a card in his hand, which he gave to his employer, who rose hurriedly.

"I fear I must dismiss you now, Greville," he said, holding out his hand, "for a client is here whose time is limited, and whose business is important. You may trust me to do all I can to help you, and before long you shall hear what progress I have made, and if any new discovery has come to light. One warning before we part—he cautions, and keep a silent tongue in your head!"

Philip nodded and took his departure, ruminating, as he walked up the Strand, on what he had just heard. Could it be possible there was any connection between him and this Matthew Seaforth? Or was it all a fancy born of Pierson's imagination—a romance woven from the very slenderest materials, and destined to end in nothing?

The young man's head began to ache, and suddenly bethinking himself of the necessity of getting some dinner, he turned into a restaurant and ordered a chop, and then sat down near the window and idly watched the busy stream of life as it passed up and down before him.

All at once his careless glance changed to one of close eagerness; his attention had been attracted by the tall figure of a woman, which, draped from head to heel in a long, black cloak, went rapidly by. Surely he recognised the contour of the form in spite of its shrouding drapery!

Snatching up his hat he hurried out, and saw the lady, turn quickly up a side street, and presently disappear within a small shop where all kinds of Eastern curiosities were exhibited in the window, and as she did so he caught a glimpse of her face, which, closely-veiled as it was, he yet immediately recognised as that of Sybil Rathven.

"Strange!" he muttered. "What brings her

here, alone, and dressed in such an out-of-the-way fashion?"

He waited for about half-an-hour, and when he saw her come out was staring in a window a few doors above. She did not observe him, and before he could get to her had hailed a hansom and sprang lightly in, so Philip went back to his chop, with his musing turned in a new direction by this last adventure.

His train did not start until five o'clock, and in the interval he collected some photographs for Haldéé, thinking to himself the while that he must inevitably meet Sybil at Paddington—at least, if she intended getting home that night. When he got to the station he looked eagerly round and scrutinized every woman who passed, but Muriel Rathven was not amongst them.

"There is not a train for Heathcliff between the 1.50 and this, is there?" he asked a porter, as he got into a smoking carriage, and proceeded to light a cigar.

"Well, sir, not as a rule, but to-day there was an excursion to Maney, and you can easily get on to Heathcliff from there."

"And what time did that leave?"

"Three-fifty, sir."

Then Philip decided, this was the one by which Sybil must have gone. When he reached the Priors, and had washed his hands and changed his coat—an operation very necessary after the London smoke and "blacks"—he went to the drawing-room, where he found the whole party assembled, Sybil included. She was seated at the piano idly turning over some music.

"So you have been to London to-day, Mr. Greville," she observed, pausing with a song in her hand; "have you brought us any news back?"

"None," he answered, understanding at once that, unaware of his having seen her, she desired to keep secret her own visit to the metropolis.

"I have travelled to-day, too," she went on; "I went to Maney to spend the day with a friend there, and didn't get back till dinner-time."

Philip made no remark, and Sybil sat down to the piano and beckoned Lord Urwick to her side.

"You must turn over the music for me," she said, smiling, "and then I will sing your favourite song, 'For Ever.'"

In a full, deep contralto she gave it, and Muriel, who was watching, felt her heart sink in despair, as she observed that Sybil attempted no disguise of the fact that she was singing wholly and solely for Claude's benefit.

"I think of all thou art to me,
I dream of what thou cannot be,
My life is cursed with thoughts of thee,
For ever and for ever."

"Perchance if we had never met,
I had been spared this mad regret,
This constant striving to forget,
For ever and for ever."

"Ah! no, I could not bear the pain,
Of never seeing thee again;
I cling to thee with might and main
For ever and for ever."

The words seemed so strangely appropriate to the situation that the singer might have improvised them herself. Even Claud seemed to feel it was not by chance she had made her selection, and a deep flush rose to his brow as she finished.

He had not been near his wife all the evening, but had been discussing the various improvements to be effected in the rebuilding of the Towers with Sybil, who knew a good deal of architecture, and was helping him to decide on different plans.

"Don't you sing, Lady Urwick?" asked Sybil, as she rose from the music stool amid a dead silence, and caught a frowning glance from Sir Jasper, who did not approve of his sister's reckless behaviour.

"Oh yes."

Miss Ruthven was surprised at the answer, which she had felt sure would be a negative.

"Then do go to the piano," murmured Haldéé, and Muriel rose at once to comply with the request. Her voice was as good as Sybil's own, and even better trained; moreover she sang with a purity of expression that the baronet's sister

lacked, and—perhaps with a very natural feminine desire to outshine her rival—she exerted herself to her utmost in the "Casta Diva."

"Why you are a very Patti!" exclaimed Sir Jasper, "I had no idea, Urwick"—turning to the Viscount—"your wife was such an accomplished vocalist."

"Nor I either," responded Claud, to whom the song was a revelation. "How is it you hide your lights under a bushel, Muriel?"

"Because I have hitherto had no interest in displaying them," she answered, with a curling lip, and little imagining what interpretation he would put on the words. A little later the party broke up and retired, the ladies and Sir Jasper to their several apartments, Lord Urwick to the smoking-room.

As soon as she thought the coast was clear Haldéé slipped out to keep her appointment with Phillip, who deemed it wiser not to acquaint her with the story Pierson had related, for fear—as was most probable—it should end in nothing.

"Do you know," said Haldéé, "a funny thing happened to-day? As I was walking along the corridor I saw Sir Jasper coming out of your room!"

This intelligence confirmed Phillip in an idea that had previously suggested itself, namely, that the baronet had had another and stronger motive for sending him to London than the desire to possess a really valuable picture.

He had wished for some reason to get him away, and had doubtless taken advantage of his absence to make a more searching examination of his various belongings.

He said nothing, however, to Haldéé of his suspicions, and presently she prepared to go.

"Good-night, my little love!" said Phillip, pressing his lips fondly on hers, as he held her folded in a close embrace. "I have a strange sort of presentiment about you, Haldéé—it seems to me as if the 'Good-bye' I am now uttering were destined to be a final one!"

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed, with a sweet low laugh. "You do not fear my faith, surely!"

"No! I believe you to be loyal and true!"

"What, then, can come between us?"

"The force of circumstances," he answered, almost solemnly. "I used to think with Tennyson, that 'Man was man and master of his fate,' but the last few weeks have taught me differently, and now I know that the strongest thing in life—the one against which there is no rebelling—is destiny!"

"You frighten me!" she said, with a little shiver, creeping closer to him. "I know our love is beset with difficulties, and that it will be very difficult to gain papa's consent, but for all that I do not see what can separate us. Nothing in the world will change my constancy!"

The young artist sighed.

"That may be, but still I can't help feeling despondent to-night. You know"—forcing a smile—"how such moods come over one sometimes, and how hard they are to shake off."

"Poor Philip—he is tired with his journey, and nasty, smoky London!" exclaimed Haldéé, rubbing her face caressingly against his, like a soft, white kitten, and not attempting anything verbal, in the belief that this form of consolation would be most effectual.

Perhaps it was. At any rate, Philip caught her to him, and as soon as he released her she sped swiftly and lightly out of the recess, and was half-way along the passage when a dark figure stepped out from behind the bronze statue, and laid a heavy hand on her arm.

CHAPTER XVI.

HALDÉE could not see in the darkness who her assailant was, but her fears immediately fixed on Sir Jasper, and like a flash of lightning came the thought of what the consequences would be should he discover her relations with Phillip.

Luckily the recess was dark, but she remembered that while she stood with her back to the passage all the light there was had concentrated itself on her lover's face.

For a few seconds she stood perfectly still; then, with a sudden wrench, she twisted her arm from her captor's grasp, and with the swiftness of a young chamois flew down the corridor, and seeing Lady Urwick's dressing-room door ajar, rushed in, and bolted it behind her.

Muriel, who had exchanged her evening dress for a robe de chambre, was sitting in an armchair at the window, looking out on the balcony that ran along the side of the house.

She started up in alarm at this intrusion on her privacy, and her surprise was not lessened when she saw who her visitor was.

"Dear Lady Urwick, let me stay here a few minutes!" entreated Haldés, clinging to her, white and trembling. "I will explain everything directly; but if anyone comes to the door don't let them in!"

Her fears were groundless, no one came; and presently Muriel, who could conceive no adequate reason for her companion's agitation, knelt at her side and took her hand.

"What is the matter, my little Haldés? How you tremble!"

"I was so frightened," sobbed the girl, hiding her face on the Viscountess's shoulder. "I thought perhaps he would pursue me in here."

"He—who do you mean?"

"Sir Jasper Rathven."

"But why should you be afraid of him?"

"I will tell you exactly how I am pleased," exclaimed Haldés, with a burst of confidence; and then she narrated the few details of Philip's courtship, ending with a confession of their meeting in the recess.

Lady Urwick remained silent for a little while, her hand wandering lovingly through the soft ripples of Haldés's golden hair.

The girl was so young, and fair, and tender, that she hesitated to say anything that might wound her, and yet for her own good it seemed necessary.

"My dear little Haldés, do you think it was quite prudent to meet Mr. Greville as you have done?"

Haldés opened her innocent blue eyes.

"It never struck me to think whether it was prudent or not," she said, and the Viscountess could not forbear a smile at the naïveté of the reply; "but if you disapprove of it, why——"

"I did not say that," Muriel interposed, gently; "but if you were to be seen by—Miss Rathven, for example—unpleasant things might be said."

Haldés was quiet for a few minutes, her azure eyes clouded over with tears, her red lips quivering.

"Dear Lady Urwick, you are so good and sweet that it seems to me whatever you say must be right!" she exclaimed at length, impetuously.

"Well, I will not meet Philip again"—conquering her tears by a great effort—"but trust to the future to make everything come right."

Muriel kissed her, and when she had gone away stood on the balcony, gazing up at the quiet stars, and thinking to herself what a wonderful thing was this love, whose sweetness she would never taste!

She little imagined in what manner the herself was to suffer by Haldés' adventure, for he who had caught hold of her was not Sir Jasper but Lord Urwick. He had been coming up from the smoking-room on his way to bed, when he saw the two shadowy figures in the recess, and recognised the one as Philip Greville, while the other seemed like that of his wife. He was in his slippers, so they did not hear him, and thus he had leisure to watch their parting, trembling the while with rage and disgust at its tenderness.

When Haldés passed him he could not resist the temptation of making his suspicions certainities, but, as we have said, she contrived to elude him, and as he saw her disappear within his wife's room the last shred of doubt as to her identity vanished, and he told himself there could no longer be any question about the artist being her lover.

Should he go and confront her—accuse her of her duplicity, and see if she had anything to say in extenuation?

No, under present circumstances he decided

it would be better not; for, at any rate, he must spare a public scandal so long as he remained the guest of Sir Jasper Rathven; afterwards—well, afterwards, he and his wife would come to some arrangement for a judicial separation, and would no longer torment each other with the constant remembrances of their unhappy union.

Thus thinking, Lord Urwick proceeded to the dressing-room, where a bed had been put up for him, and tossed about, restless and miserable, until he paid the price of fatigue, and slumber claimed him as its own.

The next morning Philip breakfasted alone in his room, but was too much occupied in his own thoughts to do justice to the coffee and ham and eggs placed before him. After a very slight repast he descended to the library, a large, oak-wainscoted apartment lined with book-shelves and furnished in antique oak and rustic leather. There, to his surprise, he found Miss Rathven sitting in front of a ponderous volume, from which she was copying into a little pocket-diary, lying at the side. She hastily closed the book as he entered, and her pale face grew a shade redder.

"You are naturally astonished to find me a book-worm," she observed, with a slight laugh, and rising as she spoke. "I confess it is not often the mania for study seizes me; but this morning the library seemed cooler and more inviting than any other place."

"Pray don't let me disturb you," said Philip, courteously, and making a movement of withdrawal.

"I have finished my reading, and am going to get ready to drive over to the Towers with Lord Urwick, so you need not go away on my account."

As she ceased speaking, she took up her book and drew forward the ladder to enable her to put it in its place, which was on the top shelf.

"Allow me," exclaimed Philip, coming forward; but she declined his assistance, and mounted the steps to replace it herself.

"After all, books are for the old, not for the young," she said, gaily, and with a ringing laugh, as she regarded *terra firma*; "except novels, of course—and it is a mistake to waste too much time over them. One's own real life is so infinitely more interesting than the fictitious lives of other people."

She had of late quite changed her manner to the young artist, and in lieu of the cold indifference that had formerly characterised it she now evinced the utmost consideration.

She took every opportunity of including him in their parties, and often asked him to join them at dinner, when Sir Jasper himself, if consulted beforehand, might have objected.

The young man, of course, did not guess that the reason of this was the desire to throw him and Lady Urwick together, and by means of their friendship convince the Viscount that his wife was untrue to him; but for all that he neither liked nor trusted Sybil Rathven. There was in her character elements of repulsion that unconsciously made their influence felt in his intercourse with her.

"By-the-by," she said, as if struck by a sudden thought, when she was leaving the room, "Lady Urwick and Miss Darrell are playing tennis. Can't you spare time to go out and join them?"

Philip hesitated. The temptation was a very great one.

"At all events, I'll tell them you will play two or three sets after luncheon," added Sybil, quietly; and before he could reply she had quitted the room, and he was left to fulfil the purpose for which he had come, i.e., that of finding a "Baronetage," and looking up the chronicles of the Rathven family.

But whether the book in question was not there, or whether it escaped his notice, cannot be said; anyhow, he could not find it, and at last gave up the search as futile.

Curiosity induced him to glance at the volume he had seen in Miss Rathven's hand, and whose place on the shelf he had particularly noticed as she put it back. He took it down and looked at it.

It proved to be a work on India, and, viewed

casually, seemed to present very few features of interest likely to appeal to Miss Rathven, who, as she had confessed, was far from studiously inclined.

"I wonder what made her choose such a dry subject?" thought Philip, as he put it on the shelf again. "Evidently it has been consulted pretty often of late, for there is no dust either upon or beneath it, and the books on each side are covered."

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1888. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

OPALS AND DIAMONDS.

—10.—

CHAPTER V.

OPALS AND DIAMONDS.

"Do you think so, Eunice?"

"I am certain of it," said Miss Molyneux raised her dark eyes, and looked straight at her mother, with conviction in her whole aspect.

The two ladies sat in a lovely little boudoir, all blue satin and filmy lace, filled with easy couches, and inviting chairs, and fragile round tables, strewed with nicknacks, Chinese carvings, Benares brass-work, Capo di Monti porcelains, Venetian glass, Ceylon ivory, Italian clay-work, Dresden figures, Sèvres vases, Roman cameos, and all the thousand and one rather useless but beautiful things that people who travel much collect.

The windows of the room commanded a lovely view; below were the mossy, ivy-grown terraces, leading to the quaint gardens of the Hall, beyond which the park, with its herds of dappled, graceful deer, and grand, old-world trees, stretched away for over a mile; and then came a sweep of woodland, and the silvery sheen of the river, as it wound its way 'twixt emerald-clad banks, shaded by ash and elm; and in the blue distance a great range of mountains bounded the view, and shut out the glimpse of the restless ocean, which fretted and lapped their base on the other side.

"What makes you certain?" inquired Lady Molyneux after a pause.

"Well, he is always there, on some pretext or other, and when he isn't there he contrives to invite, or to make me invite her here. Then he often talks of her, and continually takes down bouquets or bonbons, or the little trifles a man generally offers a woman when he is, or is going to be, in love, and his habits have altered considerably. He no longer cares for fishing, or riding, or shooting, or any of his old pursuits. He is nearly all day long on the river in that smart gingerbread skiff, and I shrewdly suspect he is not alone on these occasions. But, above all, his eyes betray him. They are always on Maggie's face; and if he turns them away for an instant back they go, as surely as the needle does to the pole. That, in my eyes, is a certain sign of the tender passion. No man looks long and often at a face unless he is very much in love with it."

"No, I should think not."

"And then his change of habit is significant. Ever since the days of Riquet with the Tuft love has worked marvellous transformations, and I actually caught my self-possessed brother blushing redly, like a schoolgirl, the other day when we met the Randals suddenly in the lane, near Streton's Oak."

"If all this is so, I am afraid what you say is true."

"Afraid, mother! Would you object to Maggie as a daughter-in-law? I thought she was a great favourite of yours!"

"So she is, and I should have no objection to her as a daughter if circumstances were different. As it is—well, as it is, I hoped and prayed he would never fall in love—never marry," finished the elder lady, with a deep sigh.

"It might be beneficial for him, and perhaps your fears may never be realised."

"Perhaps not. But what I dread for him is

an affair of this sort is a refusal. If he loves very devotedly, and she rejects him, the anguish and grief consequent upon the annihilation of his hopes may send him out of his mind. You are aware that he has never known what it is to have an ungratified wish?"

"Yes, and I think he will not be disappointed in the present instance. Look!" and Eunice drew her mother to the window, and pointed at a group coming up the avenue under the shade of the branching lime-trees.

First came sober Kate, with fox-hunting, sport-loving Squire Thornton; then Maud, walking between the Comte de Villelille and Captain Clinton, the latter looking black as a thunder-cloud at the attentions the Frenchman was paying the woman he intended to honour by asking to be his bride; for the gay, dashing Hussar had been fairly caught and meshed in the web of Maud's bright hair, and felt he would never be at rest until she had said "Yes" to his pleading, and given him the right to scowl other men off his preserves; and bringing up the rear were Maggie and Lionel.

The girl was walking out in the middle of the road, and the sun blazed down on her unprotected golden head, making a sort of halo round it, and giving to her beauty an unearthly brightness.

She was looking up at the Baronet with a smile on her scarlet mouth and a glad light in the black-lashed violet eyes, while he was bending over her with an air of passionate devotion, which showed in every gesture.

"Heaven grant he may not," said the mother, looking at the son who had cost her, since his birth, many and many a bitter pang, many and many an hour of anxious agony. "It is no wonder he loves her; she is very beautiful!"

"Yes; but not very intellectual."

"That will be all the better. What I want is a soft, sweet, little woman, who will cling to him for protection, and defer to him always. A strong, self-reliant woman would annoy and worry him."

"Yes, perhaps you are right."

"I think I am in this case. And I must try and let her see that she will be welcome to me, if she makes my poor boy happy."

So it was a very tender, cordial greeting that Maggie received from the châtelaine of Molyneux Hall, and one that put her quite at her ease, for hitherto, though the lady had been kindness herself, her stately manners and elegant appearance had awed her guest somewhat.

"Have the dresses come, Eunice?" inquired Sir Lionel after lunch, when they were all lounging on the lawn, lying on the trim turf, swinging in netted hammocks, or reclining in basket-chairs, softly cushioned, under the shade of a great clamp of horse-chestnuts.

"Yes, they came this morning."

"Are they satisfactory?"

"Well, I hardly know, except with regard to my own, and that is very satisfactory. I didn't look at the others."

"We had better overhaul them, then, by-and-by. As the ball is to-morrow night, we won't have much time for alterations, if any are required."

"Oh, I think they will be all right. Clements always sends out everything complete, and any trifling alteration Fâise can make."

"Of course. Still I have no doubt the Misses Randal would like to have a glimpse of their costumes. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes," responded Maud, who was generally spokeswoman. "I should very much."

"And so should I," said Captain Clinton, with languid emprise. "I am extremely anxious to see my turn-out as a gay cavalier."

"Come along then," rejoined Sir Lionel. "It's too hot for tennis, so we had better go now and inspect our attire. Where were they put, Eunice?"

"In the library."

And thither the young people trooped, laughing and chatting gaily, like so many magpies.

The sombre library, with its heavy crimson velvet draperies, massive oak furniture, and row upon row of ancient tomes, looked strange indeed

with the gay tasseled dresses scattered about over the chairs and tables.

"This is charming!" cried Maud, as Eunice showed her a Spanish costume of yellow satin, black lace, and crimson roses.

"Charming, indeed!" echoed Captain Clinton, who, as usual, was at her side. "You will look too lovely in it, and will break no end of hearts—that is to say," he added in a low tone, "if I don't keep you all to myself and allow you to do so, I don't think I shall, though."

The girl flashed a swift glance at him out of her pretty eyes, which made the gallant Hussar's heart beat quicker, for it was full of tenderness, and then went on inspecting the dresses.

"I wonder what I shall look like with powdered hair!" said quiet Kate, reflectively. "Rather funny, I imagine."

"Why should you?" demanded Eunice. "Dark women always look well *poudrées*, so you need have no fears."

"Do you like this?" she went on a minute later, holding up the dress of a French marquise of Marie Antoinette period.

"Yes, certainly. *C'est magnifique*," said the Comte quickly, though he was not the person addressed. "It will suit you à *merveille*."

"I am glad you like it," responded Miss Molyneux, looking at him with a faint smile on her handsome mouth.

"I like it immensely, especially as I have chosen the dress of Louis Seize. We shall be of the same period."

"Yes, Li, did you order your dress? It is not here."

"Yes, Peyton has put it in my room. I don't intend to exhibit it till to-morrow."

"That isn't fair. All our trappings were to be criticised beforehand."

"Just so, and I thought the criticisms on mine might be adverse; so as I have a particular reason for wishing to wear the costume I have chosen, I determined not to show it till the evening of our dance."

"That is decidedly shabby."

"Perhaps it is. But your thinking so won't make me alter my determination. Now, Miss Maggie," he added, turning to her, "come and see your finery," and she went with him to a chair in a distant corner of the room, on which was spread out a long robe of white satin, embroidered with beads, which glittered like icicles, bordered with snowy fur; besides it was the branch of a tree, frosted and shinny, a white fur mantle, and a pair of little white shoes, thickly encrusted with beads.

"How lovely!" ejaculated Maggie, clasping her hands in delight, for she had never before possessed such a gorgeous gown. "How exquisite!"

"Yes, but you ought to have a suite of pearl and diamond jewellery to wear with it," said Maud.

"Yes."

"You have nothing but gold ornaments, so must go without any."

"Not at all," said Sir Lionel, hastily. "If Miss Maggie will wear them, my mother has a suite of opals and diamonds, which she will lend her, I know, with great pleasure."

"Oh, thank you," gasped the young girl, almost overcome at this unexpected honour.

"It is very kind of you, Sir Lionel," Maud quickly remarked, hardly able to veil the triumph in her tones. "Opals and diamonds are exactly the right stones to wear with a costume of this sort. The flash of the diamonds and the rainbow light of the opals will relieve the dead whiteness."

"Exactly so. I am glad I thought of them. I will go and see my mother about them now."

"Miss Randal, my cavalier's attire has not received the seal of your approval," said a voice at Maud's elbow; and, turning, she saw Captain Clinton's fair, handsome face near her own.

"Won't you come and criticise it?"

"Of course, with pleasure," and with one warning glance at her younger sister, who was leaving the room with the Baronet, she went with Clinton, and admired his blue velvets and point lace, and told him it would become his style of good looks marvellously well, but re-

gretted that he had not chosen a Spanish dress, as her own was of that nation, and said so many pretty things, and looked so many pretty things, and flattered him so judiciously, and made herself so generally agreeable, that the gallant Hussar mentally registered a vow that ere many hours had elapsed he would ask her to be his bride, and go to distant India—where his regiment was stationed—when his leave expired.

The next evening, as the three Miss Randals were dressing for the ball, in one of the great oak-panelled guest chambers at the hall, a tap came at the door, and Lady Molyneux's maid entered, carrying in her hand a huge bouquet of white flowers, and a large leather box.

"For Miss Maggie, with Sir Lionel's compliments," she said, depositing the box and bouquet on the dressing-table. "Can I assist you ladies now?" she inquired. "I have finished dressing my lady."

"No, thanks," said Maud, hastily, eager to get the woman out of the room and examine the contents of the leather box. "Williams has been helping us, and we are, as you see, nearly dressed, so we won't trouble you, Branshaw."

"Thank you, miss," and to the girl's intense relief she left the room.

"Now to look at these famous jewels."

The key was attached to the handle of the case, and it seemed an age before Maud could untie the ribbon. At last she did so, and unlocking it threw back the lid.

A cry broke from the two eldest, but Maggie remained spellbound, silent, overwhelmed, at the sight of the costly jewels.

There they lay in their bed of purple velvet, flashing, sparkling, gleaming, throwing out a thousand iridescent lights, beautiful beyond description, brilliant as the play of summer sun on dancing waters, as the glow-worm in the dusk of evening, as the crystalline snow on Alpine heights.

"What glorious stones!" ejaculated Kate, astonished out of her habitual sedateness. "Lucky girl to be allowed to wear them."

"Isn't she?" chimed in Maud, adding reflectively with her usual worldliness, "I wonder what they are worth?"

"Thousands!"

"I suppose so. Come, Maggie," she continued briskly, rousing herself from her contemplation of the jewels, "let me fasten them on. Time is going, everyone will be here soon. Mind you don't lose any of them."

"I—I—think—I would rather not wear them," faltered Maggie, shrinking back.

"Not wear them? Good Heavens, why?"

"I—I—might lose them, as you say, and—and—opals—are unlucky stones, and bring misfortune to the wearer."

"Pooh! Nonsense! What old woman's tales have you been listening to?"

"None. Only it is well-known that O——"

"Are you going to make a fool of yourself now, at the eleventh hour?" demanded Maud, with contemptuous coolness, though she was secretly raging with anger at the sudden contumacy of the goose, who was to lay golden eggs for her and the rest of the family of Randal.

"No, only they are not necessary, and I would much rather not wear them."

"Nonsense. All this dead white requires some relief, and, remember, you have nothing for your hair. Let me just clasp this coronet on your head, and the necklace round your throat. If you don't like the effect you can take them off," and before Maggie could make any further objections, she deftly clasped the magnificent necklace, with its fiery, pendant opals, round her throat, and arranged the coronet amid her unbound, sunny tresses.

"Now look and tell me if it is not an immense improvement."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ICE QUEEN AND THE POLAR STAR.

MAGGIE raised her head and started, as she saw the brilliant glitter of the jewels at her throat,

and on her brow. They glowed like streams of living light.

The coronet made her look tall and queenly; her vanity was aroused. She made no further objection, and in less than no time Maud had the armlets and bracelets clasped on her milk-white arms, and the brooches and pendants dispersed about her dress.

"You look lovely now!" she said, with genuine admiration. "Sir Lionel will be more your slave than ever; and Maggie, be wise, and if he asks you again to be his wife, say 'yes.'"

"But—Terence!"

"Terence! Pooh! I've told you before that I will manage Terence. You have nothing to fear from that quarter; and if you throw away such a chance as this you deserve to die in the workhouse, as you most assuredly will, if you marry Terence O'Hara."

"Perhaps he would release me, if I write and ask him to do so. It would be the most honourable course to pursue."

"Don't count on that. If you write to him he will come back here, play the part of devoted lover, and ruin your chance of being Lady Molyneux. Let him know nothing about it till you are safely married, and beyond his reach."

"I should never be that," rejoined the girl, "I should always dread his vengeance. He would not rest until he had taken an ample revenge. I should never feel safe if the same quarter of the globe held me."

"You seem to be very certain about the intensity of his love for you," remarked Maud, with a bitterness she could not altogether conceal.

"I am. It frightens me sometimes. It is so great, and I dread to think what the consequences would be if I deceive and jilt him;" and with a shudder she turned, and picking up the soft fur mantle, threw it over her shoulders, looking, with her pale cheeks and white gown, a veritable ice-queen.

"Don't think about it," rejoined her, sister, coolly. "Act without reflection, and all will be well. If you intend to let O'Hara be a sort of bogey, and frighten you into becoming his wife, you will regret it to the last day of your life. And now if you are both ready we had better go down."

The great hall was a blaze of light and gay dresses as the three sisters came slowly down the wide oak staircase. Most of the guests had arrived, and the dome-like roof echoed and rang with the sound of glad voices and the ring of silvery laughter.

At the foot of the stairs stood Lady Molyneux, receiving her friends, magnificent and stately in the purple velvet robes of a Venetian noble dame of the fourteenth century.

By her side was Eunice, looking very handsome in her embroidered esquire, as a French Marquise, and hovering near her was Louis XVI., casting rather jealous glances at a gay Cavalier in blue velvet point lace, and a huge hat shaded by drooping feathers, who, while he waited the coming of the Spanish Senorita, saw no harm in whispering a few soft nothings to the Marquise.

A little further on was Squire Thornton in pink, with a hunting crop grasped firmly in his hand, talking to Mr. Travers's brace of buxom, milk-maidish daughters, who were attired respectively as Little Red Riding Hood and Bo-Peep, displaying rather an alarming amount of dimpled, chubby arms, considering they were a parson's daughters.

The Squire, though he talked to them, was, like Captain Clinton, watching the stairs, and the moment he saw a Watteau Shepherdess, in a wonderful bony chintz gown, with powdered locks piled high on her head, bearing in one hand a be-ribbed crook, and in the other a small woolly animal, meant to represent a lamb, coming down with a quick, "Excuse me," to the Misses Travers, went forward to meet her.

"The bouquet! I have forgotten it," whispered Maggie, as they were half-way down. "What shall I do?"

"Go back and fetch it as quickly as possible."

"Wait for me, will you? I shall never have courage to go down by myself."

"Nonsense! You must carry the bouquet. It would be a direct snub to Sir Lionel not to do so. You can come by yourself, I can't wait."

And without another word Maud ran lightly on. She had caught sight of Captain Clinton at Eunice's side, and felt a sudden sharp pang of fear lest she might again be supplanted by another woman, and her hopes dashed, her prospects of a rich and a high-bred husband destroyed and marred.

Cold, worldly, and calculating, unscrupulous to a degree, she would have hesitated at nothing to gain her own ends, and judging people by herself had very little faith in the truth and constancy of others; though she might have trusted her lover, for he had a sincere affection for her, and had no idea of trying to escape from the rosy bonds that held him.

The eager way in which he turned when Miss Molyneux remarked that the Spanish Senorita had appeared at last, and the manner in which he at once appropriated her *carte de danse*, however, relieved her feelings for the time, and she went away on his arm to join the throng of dancers who were beginning to glide and revolve over the polished boards, in a contented frame of mind.

Meanwhile Maggie had hurried back to the bedroom, her movements somewhat impeded by the sweeping dress and the heavy mantle. Seizing the bouquet she went quickly back along the gallery that ran round the hall, but after descending two or three steps her courage failed her, and she stood motionless, grasping the great bouquet in her hand, gazing down at the figures below.

It was a gay, kaleidoscopic scene. The ever shifting groups in their gorgeous, bright-coloured costumes, giving the dark-panelled sober old hall a rainbow-like appearance, much at variance with its usual aspect, and the grim steel-clad figures in its corners, and the death-dealing weapons on its walls.

The laughing, chattering, joyous throng cast no glances at the long rapiers, the thin murderous daggers, the quaint guns, and the breast-plates, dented and hacked by sword and spear, when worn in deadly fray by "Mad Molyneux," of the olden time; their thoughts were of the present, not the past, and the oddly-assorted couples paid more attention to the slippiness of the floor, and the time kept by the musicians, than they did to the "curios" on the walls. And oddly-assorted the dances, in most cases, were. Britannia was making herself agreeable to Little Boy-Blue; a Wasp in yellow and black, despite a bar of iron to blow out his chest, danced with a Puritan Maiden.

King Harold's partner was a Mermaid; a Carmelite Monk in cowl and gown of sober hue twisted and twirled with Nell Gwynne; a clown in white linen and red paint paired with Marie Stuart. Portia valed with a Crusader, Little Miss Muffet with a Viking, Lady Teasle with Mephistopheles, and Queen Elizabeth with a Harlequin.

Here and there a couple would be seen well matched. A Vivandiere and a Waterloo hero, a Turk and a lady in Yashmeem and trousers, the French Marquise and the King, who lost his head as completely as the Comte de Villefille, his representative, had lost his heart; and the Senorita, who, leaving her "gay cavalier," was being beamed about by a Matador, all gold tags and rich embroidery.

"There is not a single dress like mine," murmured Maggie, after surveying the scene. "I shall be a very remarkable object!" but even as she spoke she saw a tall figure in white approach Maud, and after a little conversation turn towards the staircase.

As he came near she saw it was Sir Lionel. He wore white satin boots, tights that showed his finely-turned limbs to advantage, a short fur coat, and a white cap, in the front of which gleamed a large diamond star.

"The Polar Star has come for the Ice Queen. Will she not descend?" he asked, smiling up at her.

With an answering smile, curving her red lips, Maggie came slowly down, her snowy, glittering dress trailing far behind; her unbound, yellow

hair falling below her waist in waves of gold, a graceful, slender shape, lithe and supple, flashing and sparkling with gems, with a background of dark oak, to throw out, in strong relief, her wonderful loveliness.

The young man stood aghast, spellbound, gazing at her. Her beauty seemed unearthly. He could hardly realize that this exquisite creature was the girl he had lost his heart to—her gorgeous trappings altered her to such a degree.

"Do you like it? Is my costume right?" she asked, misunderstanding his silence and fixed gaze.

"Like it!" he repeated, at last. "You are simply perfect to-night! Lovely beyond expression. You ought always to wear long, sweeping dresses; richly trimmed; they suit your beauty. You will be the belle to-night. Come," he added, offering her his arm, "I want to show my Ice Queen, and see her admired."

She laid a little bare hand on his arm, and swept down the room by his side in quite a regal fashion.

His words—dangerous ones for a girl of her temperament—and the admiration in his eyes, intoxicated her. She felt as though treading on air, and proud of the love and devotion with which she had inspired him.

A murmur of admiration followed them. They were such a handsome couple, and their colourless dresses made the other costumes appear garish and pronounced.

"Your sister is looking wonderfully well," remarked Clinton, who had managed to drive away the Matador from the Spanish lady's side, and was again in possession.

"Is she not?" agreed Maud; "and Sir Lionel also."

"Yes, I had no idea Li was such a handsomer fellow. Nineteenth-century costume isn't nearly as becoming. I shall advise him always to appear as the Polar Star."

"I hardly think he will take your advice."

"Perhaps not. Still he might do worse."

"As far as his personal appearance is concerned!"

"Of course."

"You think nothing of comfort, then?"

"Indeed, I do. But, at the same time, I am convinced that many men, who look simply hideous now in the orthodox stove-pipe hat, high collar, and funeral black coat, would be decent-looking fellows if attired in murry-coloured velvet doublet and hose, in the courtier's dress of the fourteenth century, or after the fashion of the merry monarch's time."

"In that case," rejoined Maud, with a rough glance at him, "I suppose we may expect to see Captain Clinton appear in blue velvet and point lace, and a huge hat, for the rest of his natural life."

"No, indeed," answered the gallant Captain, with a gay laugh, "I should never be able to cultivate the love-locks, so necessary to the costume, and I could not condemn myself to the purgatory of wearing this wig every day, as the curis have a habit of flying about in an uncommon fashion and tickling my nose, and, besides, the heat of it is almost unbearable."

"Why don't you take it off?"

"I shall look rather odd with a close-cropped head and a Charles the Second coat, shall I not?"

"No; it will only be a novel blending of Roundhead and Cavalier."

"If you think so—if you approve of the removal of my headgear, off it comes. Yours is the only opinion I care about."

"You are trying to flatter me."

"Not at all. You must know, Miss Randal, that I care more for your good opinion than for anything else in the whole world."

"I feel very much flattered at your saying so," she answered, softly; and then fearing he was going to propose to her, and feeling after his last words that she was pretty sure of him, and might play him a little, and let the proposal come after they were better acquainted, she said,

abruptly, "don't you intend to ask the bells of the evening for a dance?"

"Who is that?" he queried. "You know I can see but one beautiful face in the room."

"I mean the Ice Queen," she answered, hurriedly. "Come, you will not have a chance of getting one if you leave it any later; she is being besieged!"

"Yes, and Sir Lionel does not look over well pleased at the admiration Miss Maggie is receiving. I suppose before long he will have the right to publicly object to it, and lock her away in a glass case, if he is so minded!"

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Maud, carelessly, as they approached the group that surrounded the Ice Queen.

"Miss Maggie, have you one dance left?" asked the Hussar.

"Not one," declared Molyneux, triumphantly. "I have just taken the last!"

"Then I think you ought to give it to me, as I have no doubt you have not been backward in decorating Miss Randal's card with your time-honoured name."

"You are quite right, I have," acquiesced the Baronet, coolly; "and I should have liked to take every one, but wouldn't be greedy."

"That was kind of you. I wonder how many you left for other fellows?"

"Six."

"Out of twenty-two? That is a very fair allowance, and I really think you might spare me that last one."

"Well, in consideration of our long and intimate friendship, and as it is only a square, if her majesty consents to the change of partners, I will let you have it."

"Thank you, Li, you are magnanimous. Have I your majesty's consent?" he asked, turning to Maggie.

"Yes, you have our gracious permission to inscribe your name thereon," she answered, entering into the spirit of the thing, and handing him her card with a graceful gesture and a charming smile, blushing at the same time, in a lovely way, at her own temerity.

"Thanks," and Clinton took the dainty little programme, all pale blue satin and silver, and wrote his name down. "I regret that it is the only one your majesty can give me."

"I am also sorry," she answered; "for Maggie was very partial to the fair-haired soldier, who resembled, in his blonde beauty, the man who had first taught her what love was."

"Does that mean that you would like to give him some of my dances?" whispered the Baronet, bending till his dark moustache brushed the golden curls clustering on her forehead.

"Oh, no!" she replied quickly, giving him one of her bewitching shy glances, that made his pulses beat madly. "I would rather dance with you than with anyone else."

"Dearest!" he muttered under his breath, looking at her with passionate eyes, and giving the little hand that lay within his arm a closer pressure.

"I have waited with great patience, Lionel," at length remarked Clinton, "for you to give my partner to me; as, however, you don't seem at all inclined to do it, I must take her, or I shall lose the dance," and offering her his arm, the Captain led her to one of the sets of Lancers that were being formed, while Sir Lionel, with one of his sunny, sweet-tempered smiles, went over to an elderly dowager, ridiculous in a youthful get-up as Madame de Pompadour, and besought her to honor him with her hand for the dance, a request which was at once smilingly complied with, to the utter dismay of her host, who had been under the impression that she was too ancient to totter even through a square, and who had asked her out of mere politeness.

"Quite a family party," observed Clinton, looking round their set. "Both your sisters, and one who will some day be nearer and dearer to you."

"Who—who do you mean?" faltered his partner.

"Lionel Molyneux. I suppose before long I shall have to congratulate you, and, believe me, I shall do it with sincerest pleasure. He is a thorough good fellow, and one worthy of you,

which is saying a great deal. You will be very happy as his wife."

"I—that is—he—we—not his wife," muttered Maggie, in a state of hopeless confusion, which Clinton attributed solely to her youth and inexperience, and so went on coolly praising his friend, while she remained silent, feeling utterly helpless to explain matters to him, especially as Maud, with the Matador, all gold tags and devotion, was her sis-à-vis, and kept her eyes fastened on her younger sister's face, while she listened and smiled at the Matador's compliments, and seeing in a dim way that a web was being woven around her, from which she would find it impossible to escape, chiefly through Maud's machinations and Sir Lionel's great love, and a little because of her own yielding, weak temperament, which made her helpless to speak the truth, and extricate herself from a false position.

She was dominated and swayed by the strong will of her unscrupulous sister, in whose hands she was malleable and plastic as wax, and whose specious arguments made her uncertain as to what was right and what wrong. Then, her affections were engaged, and it is hard, indeed, to do what is right when the heart inclines us to do what is wrong, and the poor butterfly found it so.

"There will be more than one wedding in your family before the year is over, I think," rattled on the Captain gaily. "Thornton has evidently lost his heart to your eldest sister."

"Do you think so?" queried Maggie, glad of the turn the conversation was taking.

"Yes, don't you?"

"I don't know, I haven't thought about it."

"Well, think about it now, and give me your opinion. Does it not look like a case?"

"Yes, I suppose it does," she assented, after studying Kate, who looked almost pretty, with her powdered locks and châtelaine gown, and who was listening to Squire Thornton's speech with an air of extreme interest, and a shy smiling aspect that was quite new to her.

"I am sure of it. I only wish I was as certain that your sister Maud cared for me; I am afraid she doesn't," and he looked rather jealously at the Matador, whose handsome head was bent over the Senator's mantilla in a very tender manner, "and I shall never care for any other woman."

"I think she does like you."

"Oh I thank you for that. But I am not sanguine. Her manner is very charming, but very cold towards me, and if I attempt to grow tender she becomes like ice, and it makes me fear to propose lest I be refused. Sometimes I could swear she loves me, and yet altogether I am puzzled."

"So am I," said Maggie, truthfully, for she was aware that Maud, having failed to fascinate the Baronet, was quite ready to take the next best man in the county; and Clinton being of good family, with a fair income and great expectations from an old aunt, was decidedly an excellent match for a woman in her position; therefore, what reason could she have for rejecting him when he tried to propose?

Maggie was too young and too unworldly to understand the motives which prompted her sister. It would never have occurred to her if she liked a man to hide her real feelings, and play with him as a cat would a mouse, partly to exercise the power she possessed over him, and partly to make him value her "yes" more when she was graciously pleased to say it.

"Is she a flirt?" he asked, abruptly, after a time spent in watching the fair face opposite lit up with smiles, and the blue eyes, which were lifted and then dropped in a very taking and bewitching way.

"No, I think not."

And Maggie was right. Miss Maud Randal had always kept too good an eye to the main chance to waste her time in such frivolity as flirting, which she was well aware seldom led to anything serious; but she had an object in view, which made her smiling and gracious to everyone in the room, save the unlucky one, who loved her with his whole heart!

"Then my chance is a very bad one, I fear.

She must care for that fellow Lister. She never looks like that when I speak to her."

"How can you tell?"

"Because I seldom have my eyes off her face when we are together, and she always seems to be bored."

"You are wrong, I am sure. She has always spoken to me as though she liked you."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Then will you, Miss Maggie, the next time she honours me by speaking of me, say a few words in my favour. I love her so dearly—my future life will be wretched without her, unless it is to appeal to her affection."

"Indeed I will," responded the youngest Miss Randal, warmly, touched by the pained look in his azure orbs, feeling that she could not refuse his request, but knowing, only too well, how useless it was to appeal to her sister's pity, or try to alter her determination.

"Thanks a thousand times. They are going to supper now," he added, as the motley throng began to converge towards a door at the upper end of the hall, which led to the dining-room. "I see Molyneux has handed Madame de Pompadour over to the Pope of Rome, and is coming for you, so I will go and claim my Senator, or Lister will persuade her to go in with him," and hurrying away the Hussar managed just to come up with the Matador and his partner as they reached the door, and a lively discussion ensued as to which should escort her to supper.

Maud, however, at last decided in favour of the "gay cavalier," fearing to snub him too much, lest she should lose him altogether, and, with a cool bow to her Spanish friend, went into the supper-room on his arm, and joined the Ice Queen who was at a little table in a cosy corner, partially screened by palms and ferns from the rest of the room.

"What a splendid place this is!" Maud took the opportunity of remarking when their cavaliers had gone to the large table in search of dainties for them.

"Isn't it?" agreed the other, looking round with a somewhat wistful gaze at the mirrors in their quaint, richly-carved frames, at the brass sconces, in which flared tinted candles, and at the Dabbots, and Vanderveldes, and matchless copies by Powell that decorated the walls.

"The mistress of it will be a lucky woman," continued the temptress.

"Yes," with a sigh, again responded the Ice Queen.

"I wonder what the Parsonage will seem like when we return to it after staying here!"

"I don't know."

"Don't you? I do. It will seem like a den, a hovel, with its faded, threadbare carpets, its rickety chairs and tables, and its general aspect of dirt and poverty."

"Not quite so bad as that."

"Every bit as bad, and you know it will! I hate the place!"

"You have an opportunity of leaving it now if you choose to take it."

"So have you," retorted Maud, quickly, "and such a one as few girls are lucky enough to get. If you are sensible you will take it, *c'est qui écrit dans le futur*. Think—just think—you have but to say 'yes' to a man that adores you and you will be mistress of all this magnificence, free for ever from the grim poverty that has been our portion all the days of our lives."

"And—and—my promise—my engagement—Terry's love?" faltered the poor butterfly, still struggling faintly to keep her plighted word.

"Pooh!" replied her sister, contemptuously, "don't think about it, but

"Sing heigh-ho unto the green bolly!
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly."

Sir Lionel will sit you again to-night, I see it in his eyes; he can no longer hold passion in a leash. If you are wise, if you are not worse than a fool, you will accept him. Play with him any longer," she added, impressively, seeing him approach, "and you will lose your pride, and doom yourself to a life of drudgery and wretchedness. Promise me that you will say yes!"

But Maggie sank back in her chair, silent and pale as death.

CHAPTER VII.

DO YOU LOVE ME?

" You are tired. You have been dancing too much," said Sir Lionel, later on in the evening.

" Yes, I am a little weary," acknowledged his partner, drooping her beautiful head to avoid the ardent glances of the dark eyes that sought hers so fondly.

" Then you must not dance again. There are only five more waltzes on the programme; it is nearly over. I shall take you away."

" But I couldn't sleep. My room is so near, I shall hear the music," objected Maggie.

" Did I say that I was going to send you to bed like a naughty child?"

" No."

" And I don't intend to either. I am going to take you to the picture gallery. It will be cool there, and dim, and probably deserted at this hour, and those are all recommendations in my eyes. We shall find it a relief after the glow and glitter here. Don't you think so?"

" Yes," she assented, faintly.

If she dared she would have said no, for what were recommendations to him were drawbacks to her, and she knew full well that a dim, quiet spot is just the place for an avowal of love. But what could she do? It was impossible, she reasoned, to tell him she feared he was again going to ask her to be his wife, and therefore would rather remain among "the madding crowd," as he might have no intention of so doing, and it would never do to suggest it, and so she went quietly with him to the great gallery, where the ceiling was of cedar, and the boards of slippery polished oak, and where portraits of "mad Molynes" of olden days hung on the walls, frowning grimly, or smiling sweetly, as the case might be, on their descendant and his fair companion.

On one side were a row of great bay windows, commanding a view of the park and woodlands with softly-cushioned seats, forming delightfully cosy nooks, and into one of these he led her, and arranged the fur cloak round her shoulders, and sat beside her gazing out at the distant landscape.

The moon was up, round, full, shedding its mellow light around, on hill and dale and valley, and shining on the river that glistened like molten silver in its cold beams; a nightingale was singing in the larch spinney, and over all was the balmy beauty of the summer's night, the mysterious glamour of the midnight hours.

In silence they sat there side by side, in the great, dim, deserted gallery, neither speaking—he because he felt if he spoke that his words would be of love, and therefore perhaps displeasing to her, as she had shown so much emotion and confusion on a former occasion, when he had sought to win a "yes" from her rosy lips—she because she dreaded to hear him plead again for love, fearing that she would hardly now be able to refuse him what he asked, since he had become so dear to her.

The minutes wore away, the silence was becoming oppressive, and the heat also to Maggie, wrapped up in the cloak, and at last she pushed it partly off, letting it trail on the ground.

" Are you hot, child?" he asked, in the tenderest of tones.

" Yes," she answered, moving restlessly; " a little."

" Let me take it away."

And he bent down, and, taking it from her shoulders threw it on the seat opposite. His breath fanned her cheek, and she flushed at his close proximity.

" You are over-tired. You must not dance so much another night. Your face has quite a fever-flush on it. I hope you won't be ill."

" It is nothing," she answered, carelessly; " merely the warmth of the night. I am never ill."

" I am glad of that. I should be fearfully anxious if you got ill. I could not bear to lose you now."

She looked up at him at these words, and wondered was she so much to him.

So much to him! Ah! she did not guess. He was not fully conscious how much she was to him; only in a sort of way he knew that life would be worthless to him unless shared with her.

The dim light fell on her lovely face, and bare, dimpled arms, and snowy throat, with its glittering load of jewels. She looked dangerously fair, enough to bewitch any man out of his senses, and the one at her side was getting mad over her, for the glances she gave him out of her great starry orbs were such a delicious combination of shyness and tenderness, that they told him only too plainly what she wanted to conceal—the story of her love.

He looked at her with passionate eyes, longing to clasp her matchless beauty close to his breast and bid her nestle there, and make it her safe haven and refuge for the rest of her life, and his passion conquered. Without a word he took her in his arms, straining her close to him; and Maggie, weary and loving, did not stir, but lay on his breast with closed eyes, while he rained down kisses on her sweet face.

Honour—faith to the man whose plighted wife she was, to whom she was bound, what were they to her as Sir Lionel's arms enclosed her, as his lips met hers. For awhile all was forgotten, save that they loved, these two who stood locked in a close embrace.

O'Hara's passionate devotion, her plighted word, the story Kate had told of the dreadful mental malady that afflicted every other generation of the Molynes family, all—all was forgotten. But moments such as these, full of a mad, delirious joy cannot last.

With a rush came remembrance, and with a gasping sob she tore herself from her lover's arms, and stood in the silvery moonlight shivering and trembling, white as the costly robe that swept around her, shading her ashy face with her hands, as though to keep off the fond glances she knew she had no shadow of a right to encounter.

" Maggie, what is it?" he asked, in consternation, trying to take her back to his arms.

" No—no," she said, shrinking away. " You—you mustn't touch me!"

" Why?" he demanded.

" I—I can't tell you!"

" Maggie, what do you mean? Why do you repel me? You know—you must know—unless you are wilfully blind, how ardently I adore you. Since I last spoke you have become dearer—a thousand times dearer—to me. I want you for my wife, my—"

" Oh! hush—hush!" she moaned. " I cannot listen to you."

" Why not?"

" In pity do not ask me."

" But I must. What is this mystery? What is it separates us?"

" I cannot tell you. But—indeed—I can be nothing to you."

" And you will not tell me why?"

" I cannot."

" I have thought you loved me. Have I been mistaken? Is it possible that you are a finished coquette, and have merely been amusing yourself by torturing me?"

She did not answer this speech, save by raising her great luminous eyes, dewy with tears, to his, and some of the pain and passion he saw in their violet depths made a dark flush rise to his cheek, a thrill of triumph run through his frame.

" Maggie," he said, softly, once more clasping her in his arms, despite her resistance, " is it hatred you feel towards me, or—do you love me? Answer," he went on, putting his hand under the dimpled chin, and turning up her face till he could look into her eyes.

" I—I—love—you," she faltered, scarcely above a whisper, hiding her face on his broad breast.

" My dearest," and he pressed the golden head tenderly to him; " and you will always love me!"

" Yes—yes. And now in pity let me go. Leave me," cried the poor child, brokenly.

" Leave you? Let you go!" he asked, with a

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ring of great gladness in his voice. "Do you think I shall do that, sweetheart, after what you have told me. You must be my wife—you are mine now as utterly as if you were my wedded wife already."

“No—no—it cannot be.”

“But it shall be, love. What is there to part us, tell me?”

“The difference in our positions,” she murmured, thus hard pressed, hardly knowing what to say.

“That is nothing,” he answered gladly. “You are beautiful enough to be a duchess. I have ample for both, and, as the old song has it, ‘all that’s mine is thine, lassie.’ You will be my wife!”

For a while Maggie was silent, torn by conflicting emotions; remorse for the man who trusted her, who was far away; love for the man who wooed her so fondly, who was at her side; fear of O’Hara’s vengeance, ambition to be Lady Molyneux, and queen of the county, and possessor of the opals and diamonds that flashed and glittered on her rounded arms and throat.

“Must I answer now? Won’t you let me think a little?” she queried faintly, trying to put off the evil moment that would make her a traitress to both men who loved her so well.

“Of course, dearest. How long, though, will you be ‘thinking’?”

“A week—will you give me a week?”

“Yes, and at the end of that time I shall claim my answer.”

“Yes, and now please let me go.”

“Certainly, the moment after you have said ‘Lionel, I love you better than anything else in the world.’”

For a moment she hesitated, but seeing his look of determination, she said in her low, soft tones, “Lionel, I love you better than anything else in the world,” and blushing carnation red, she wrenched herself from his restraining arms and fled swiftly out of the gallery—a slim, white shape, with floating golden hair, and trailing, shimmering robes.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1885. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

FACETIA.

SHE : “I broke my watch yesterday. Isn’t it a pity!” He (gallantly) : “It is the privilege of beauty to kill time.”

ELVIRA (showing Pearl her photograph) : “Awful, isn’t it?” Pearl : “Yes; but it’s a splendid likeness.”

TIRED MAMMA : “What on earth are you crying about now, Willie!” Tired Willie (between sobs) : “Well, what else is there to do?”

FOND MOTHER : “My daughter’s voice has been a great expense to me.” Visitor (who has been listening to it for an hour) : “And can you do nothing for it?”

“It always pays a man in my business to take plenty of time,” murmured the burglar softly to himself, gently dropping the third tray of gold watches into his capacious bag.

JONES : “It is said that Dame Fortune knocks once at every man’s door.” Smith : “Well, it was her daughter, Miss Fortune, who called on me.”

GLADYS : “I am afraid you aren’t as pretty as nurse.” Mamma : “What makes you think so?” Gladys : “We’ve been walking in the park a whole hour, and not a single policeman has kissed you.”

TEACHER : “Willie, does your mother know that the buttons are off your coat?” Willie : “Yes’m; and she knows where they are, too.” Teacher : “Where are they?” Willie : “On father’s trousers.”

CUSTOMER : “Are these eggs strictly fresh?” Grocer’s Clerk : “Yes, sir. You haven’t found anything wrong with the eggs you’ve been getting here for the last month, have you?” Customer : “No.” Grocer’s Clerk : “Well, these are a part of the same lot.”

“WAITER!” he called, after vainly struggling with a knife and fork full ten minutes on an alleged spring chicken. “Waiter, bring me a chilled steel wedge and a heavy hammer, for I’m interested now, and I’m determined to see of what material this thing is made.”

“THERE is one way I can surely tell if you are the long-lost heir,” said the dignified matron to the applicant for restitution to the family circle. “Have you a strawberry mark on your left arm, just below the shoulder?” “I have,” calmly and fearlessly replied the man. “Ah! then you are not my son,” said the lady.

SYNNEX : “So you love Miss Sugarknick!” Sweene : “Oh, yes!” Synnex : “You love her because she loves you, and she loves you because you love her. Bah! That amounts to the same thing as each of you being in love with yourself.”

RAGGED Haggard (at the door) : “If ya please, lady—” Mrs. Muggs (sternly) : “There, that will do. I am tired of this everlasting whine of ‘Lady, lady.’ I am just a plain woman, and —” Ragged Haggard : “You are, maddum—one of the plainest women I ever seen, an’ one of the honestest to own up to it.”

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SOCIETY.

THE Queen will not allow the speed of the train by which she travels to exceed an average of under forty miles an hour.

PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA, will, if all goes well, visit the Queen at Balmoral in the early autumn. Her Royal Highness is back in Germany after her absence in China.

HER MAJESTY'S next residence at Windsor Castle will be for about three weeks, when the Court will remove to Osborne. A brilliant regatta week is expected there in August, and the German Emperor will be present.

A YOUTH living in The Hague, recently wrote to Queen Wilhelmina, telling her of his musical talent, his ambition, and the financial obstacles thereto. The Queen ordered that the matter should be at once investigated and ascertaining that the case was a genuine one, gave orders that the boy should have instruction from a first-class master for six months. At the end of that time, if the student promises well, the Queen will undertake the cost of his musical education.

THE Duke and Duchess will be the guests of the Queen at Osborne during Goodwood and Cowes week. The Duke of Connaught will visit Dandee in October, when on his way south from Balmoral, in order that he may open the Victoria Hospital for Incurables, which has been built at a cost of fifty thousand pounds, and he is also to unveil the Diamond Jubilee statue of the Queen. It is expected that the Duke will be the guest of Lord Camperdown at Camperdown House during his stay in Fife-shire.

THE Empress Dowager of Russia has left St. Petersburg with the Grand Duchess O'gá and the Grand Duke Michel for Cachina, where her Majesty intends to reside until the middle of July, when she goes to Gmünden to visit the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland at their seat on the Traun See (where the Princess of Wales is expected about the same time), and early in August the sisters will proceed to Denmark for a stay of two months. The Grand Duchess Xóris, elder daughter of the Empress Dowager, and wife of the Grand Duke Alexander Michailovich, is at present staying at Cachina.

THE King of Spain is guarded during his nightly slumbers by a picked body of men, who, according to an old custom, must be natives of the town of Espinosa, and have served with honour in the Army. They lock the palace gates with much ceremony at midnight, and unlock them at seven o'clock in the morning; during the whole of the night they keep vigilant watch in and about the Royal residence.

No one in his household knows in which room the Sultan intends to sleep at night. He has more than a score of bedrooms, separated from the rest of the building by iron doors at the end of each corridor; the door of each room is furnished with lock of ingenious construction, and two enormous dogs lie outside the room where Abdul is sleeping.

THE authorities at Windsor Castle are engaged in a thorough overhauling of all the arrangements for protection against fire. The value of the treasures in the Queen's Windsor residence and of the articles of value in this national storehouse is estimated at some millions of pounds sterling, and yet they are practically uninsured, while the methods for their protection against fire have been most antiquated. The Commissioner of Works has made an inquiry into the whole matter, with the result that some very considerable and much-needed improvements are being made. As almost all the members of the new brigade live outside the walls of the castle, electric fire-alarms will be fitted up to their residences, connecting them with the fire-station at Windsor Castle. The present water arrangements leave nothing to be desired, for from the reservoir at Cranbourne Towers, some miles away in the forest, there is such an ample supply that a jet of water can be pumped to a greater height than the Round Tower of the Castle.

STATISTICS.

THERE are about 900,000 houses in Ireland. The sun yields 800,000 times the light of the moon.

LAND in England is three hundred times as valuable now as it was two hundred years ago.

THE embracing extent of the British Empire may be judged from the fact that it contains 10,500 islands and 2,000 rivers.

THERE are more wrecks in the Baltic Sea than in any other place in the world. The average is one wreck a day throughout the year.

GEMS.

EVIL SPEAKING can do no lasting evil, for the wall of friendship that is so frail it will crumble to dust beneath the lash of an evil tongue is not worth having.

THE prudent sees only the difficulties, the bold only the advantages, of the great enterprise; the hero sees both, diminishes those, makes these predominate, and conquers.

NOTHING is easier than ridicule; and in nine cases out of ten where ridicule is used, it is resorted to only because it is the only weapon available. The man of intelligence will use his reason in argument with his opponent; the man of knowledge will use his knowledge; but the man who has neither knowledge nor intelligence must resort to ridicule. It is a poorly furnished armoury which supplies no better weapon.

THE best things in the world do not come to us ready-made. . . . Truth must be searched for with patient toil. Beauty must be wrought out with painstaking devotion. Food and raiment must be wrested from the furrow and woven in the loom. And all our social and political institutions must be fought for on the field of battle, defended in the forum and vindicated in the courts. Even our religious faith must be thought out anew in the soul conflicts of each generation, or they become mere forms of words, devoid of life and power.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BROWN ROBIN.—To make water for a dozen bottles add half-ounce ginger; boil half an hour, then add half-pound syrup, half-pound sugar, teaspoonful cream of tartar, and set; let it come to boil, then empty into a "crock" or deep basin, and cool till it is lukewarm, when add a cupful of yeast.

STEWED TOMATOES.—Pour boiling water over the tomatoes and then remove the skins. Chop them fine and put them in a double boiler without the addition of water. Season with salt, pepper, butter, onion (a little sugar, if you like), one tablespoonful of crackers or toasted bread and stew one hour.

BOSTON CHOW.—Take one pound of brown sugar, boil in four quarts of water for a minute; when cold add two ounces tartaric acid, one pennyworth essence of lemon and white of egg switched; strain and bottle it; for a drink pour out half a tumbler, fill up with water, add a little baking soda, stir about, and you have a fine cheap cooling drink.

SCALLOPED TOMATOES.—Season one quart of tomatoes with salt and pepper to taste, one-half cup of sugar and a few drops of onion juice. Butter a deep baking-dish and sprinkle over it a layer of bread-crums and put in a layer of tomatoes. Dot with bits of butter; then bread-crums, tomatoes, and so on until the dish is full having the bread-crums on top. Moisten with sweet cream and bake in a moderate oven. Brown just before sending to the table.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TEA in China sells for 3d. a pound.

INDIAN bats measure 6ft. across the wings.

The skeleton measures one inch less than the height of the living man.

An important industry of Paris is the manufacture of toy soldiers from sardine and other tins that have been thrown away.

In St. Petersburg is the largest bronze statue in existence—that of Peter the Great, which weighs one thousand tons.

The doll is probably the most antique of the toys. It has been found inside the graves of the children of ancient Rome.

In nearly every street in Japanese cities is a public oven, where, for a small fee, housewives may have their dinners and suppers cooked for them.

The smallest perfect watch ever made is owned by a Russian princess. The works are inside a splendid diamond scarcely two-fifths of an inch in diameter.

TORTOISEHELL as it comes from the West Indies is coarse, dirty, and lustreless, and only the most skilful and patient manipulation makes it the rich and beautiful material that it eventually becomes.

The most costly Parliament of Europe is that of France. The Senate and Chamber of Deputies eat up annually £300,000. The same item for the other chief European nations is as follows:—Spain, £80,000; Italy, £66,000; Austria, £52,000; Great Britain, £51,020.

The now fashionable game of golf was put down by an Act of Parliament in Scotland in 1481 as a nuisance. Then fines were inflicted on people who were found guilty of playing the game, for it interfered with the practice of archery, as men preferred wielding the club to pulling the bow.

Blind men in Japan, instead of being led by a child, or dog with a string, carry a whistle, which they blow, and those who hear it leave the pathway free before their feet. There are a great many blind men in Japan, and the plaintive whistle has a mournful sound when heard at night.

This harp has almost died out of Wales, but less than 20 years ago all the principal hotels kept a proficient harpist whose duty it was to play for the amusement of visitors; the innkeeper who failed to provide this form of entertainment for his guests could not hope to compete with his fellows.

At Canton the average number of executions is about 300 per year, but in 1855 50,000 rebels were beheaded. The headsman formerly received 15s. a head, but the supply and competition have reduced the wage to 2s. apiece. Most of the criminals who are beheaded are water pirates or land bandits.

AFRICA gives some amusing details of the mercantile value of certain articles among the natives needles and cloth ranking highest. They are absolutely current coins. Three needles will purchase one chicken; one needle, two eggs. Old tins and empty bottles are also much in request, old cans taking the place of drinking cups. A fowl can be had for two yards of cotton or a small piece of cloth.

STAR photography is one of the most tedious operations known. In some cases, the exposure of the plate must last for several hours. During all this time both the plate and telescope must be moved so that the image of the star will be stationary on the plate. The exposure for a star of the 16th magnitude is two hours, and only the image of one at a time can be secured, unless those adjoining happen to be of the same size.

It is generally supposed that the nuggets which are being found in the river gravels of the Klondyke and other gold-bearing regions have been brought down by the river direct from the reefs in which the gold originally lay. Many practical miners and scientific men, however, have long been of the opinion that the nuggets have grown where they are now found, just as crystal salt will grow in brine.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

GREEK—A Greek phalanx consisted of 6,000 men.

VICTORIA.—The Queen is now in her eighty-first year.

H. M. S.—The Prince of Wales is five feet eight inches high.

BELLS OF NEW YORK.—You had better consult a skin specialist.

A. G.—It is always a matter for arrangement between the respective nations.

IN DEBT.—Better offer to pay by instalments; you unquestionably owe the money.

C. H.—Charles Dickens was born on February 7th, 1812. He died on June 9th, 1870.

ANNETTE.—The name by which a person is usually known must be given at marriage.

FIDDLE-FACE.—Nothing but good health and a natural inclination will make the cheeks plump.

METROPOLIS.—The largest covered railway station in England is said to be Liverpool-street, London.

ANONYMOUS.—As the offer was anonymous you can take no notice of it whatever, nor can you thank anyone.

GOWARD.—Cocaine certainly prevents pain in tooth extraction, but we cannot say that it is not harmful.

JACK TAR.—The buyer would have to perform all existing covenants. The trees must not be removed.

TROUBLE.—The conscientious objection required is a belief that vaccination would be injurious to your child.

HOLLY.—We believe it is a popular belief that a holly bush planted near a dwelling, protects the house from lightning.

MOMA.—Your husband could bequeath his property as he pleased. It rests with him, not with you, to forbid the visits.

ONE IN DOUBT.—The way to discover a true lover from a flirt is to observe his behaviour in the company of other ladies.

OLARION.—Take not the least notice of the slight, since writing for an explanation would only be still further compromising your dignity.

PENPALTRY.—If the will forms you have bought do not meet your requirements you had better consult a lawyer. It will be cheapest in the end.

CONSTANT READER.—Go to a good bookseller, and ask for an elementary book within your means. It is difficult to recommend any in particular.

TINY.—You may rub them down with the finest glass-paper till below the marks; then, if necessary, stain to match, and re-polish with French polish.

DUTCHMAN.—Probably the fault with your lamp is some defect in the burner. A good lamp ought to be free from odour. Is your oil of the best quality?

B. L.—Never use a dry chamois skin for rubbing polished wood, no matter how soft it may be, as it is a material which collects and retains the dust.

ROSS.—Do not accept the hand of any man for whom you have not both love and respect. Better decline a score of offers than risk a life of wedded misery.

FLIRT.—Flirtation is detestable in a young female who has an acknowledged sweethearts. It is a strong symptom of a weak, reprehensible, and most selfish vanity.

KISS ME QUICK.—We are not acquainted with any book which gives the "meaning of kisses." Those who indulge in them usually need no interpretation of their meaning.

SLAVY.—Dip a piece of clean newspaper in cold water, and remove all the dirt from the window; then polish with dry newspaper. This plan gives the glass a brilliant polish.

IGNORAMUS.—A granddaughter of James VI. married a German prince, and through her George I. came to the throne of Great Britain; the Queen is in the direct descent of that line.

VIOLLET.—If you cannot sponge it off with plenty of cold water, it must have penetrated the stuff itself, and to interfere with that would, of course, injure the waterproof qualities.

MUD LOCKS.—It is foolish attempting to change the colour of your hair. The colour that nature has given one is usually the one best adapted to one's complexion and general appearance.

INCOMPATIBILITY.—A mutual agreement to separate does not annul a marriage; nor does it give to such parties the liberty of marrying again without first obtaining a legal divorce.

MAGGIE.—Your best plan will be to try and restrain from thinking about him at all. He will show you much more plainly, if he really has any intention of asking you to be his wife.

NEW READER.—A woman should be over twenty. While nature dictates that the man should be the older, yet there is no obligation requiring him to be five years, or any given number of years the senior.

YOUNG MOTHER.—Bathes a bruise with vinegar as soon as the accident happens; if it can be kept in place, a cloth soaked in vinegar over the injury, wetting it as it dries, and these will be very little discolouration.

DISPUTANT.—Ninety-nine is not one hundred; it requires one more to complete the century, consequently the year 1900 is the last of the nineteenth century, and the year following is the year one of the twentieth.

A. M.—Spread a paste on made of fullers' earth, and either cold water or ammonia and water mixed in equal proportions. Leave till quite dry, and then brush off, see that no one steps on the spots while they are being treated.

HELPLESS AND LOWLY.—If you can prove positively that the man was your brother and that he left property, if he made no will and you are his nearest relative, you will be entitled to the property. You cannot depend on hearsay evidence.

ONE IN DOUBT.—It is evident that your affections are not very deeply engaged. When you truly love a man, as a woman should the man with whom her whole future is to be cast, there will be doubt in your mind as to your preferences.

LIMA.—Fill the bottle with finely chopped potato skins, cork tightly, and let the bottle stand for two or three days, when the skins will ferment. Turn out and rinse. The bottle after this process should be bright.

PARTIC.—Fat in which there is salt should never be used for greasing cake-tins. Perhaps this is a mistake you have been making. Well grease them with lard or any unsalted fat, and you will not have any more difficulty.

UNCONVENTIONAL.—If you have your parents permission it will do no harm to correspond with a young man whom you know intimately. Indiscriminate correspondence with young men, however, is not practised by young ladies of good taste.

DEAR OLD DAYS.

GONE are the days, the dear old days;
Changed is the charm of sweet old ways;
Since Grandmama in the sunlight
Retold the "Fairy Lore" each night.
They were the days dear Grandma wore
Her snow-white kerchief crossed before.

GONE are the days, the dear old days;
Changed is the charm of sweet old ways;
Since life was one rose-coloured dream,
And joyously we sailed the stream,
When all the world was fair to view,
And all the skies a rosette hue.

STILL in that form of dear old days,
When Nature revelled in her ways,
And ever at a far-off word
The eye was moist, the pulse was stirred.
Ah! they were days that knew no nad
Of seeming bared and never gird.

OH! dear old friends! Oh! dear old days!
Oh! I idolise! Oh! I sweet old ways!
Life may, perhaps, at autumn calm
Be less vain hopes, restore a halo,
But, oh! for days when worlds of bliss
Were crowded in one heartfelt kiss!

M. F.—To appear at a wedding in deep mourning would be in very bad taste. As you feel you cannot forego the pleasure of witnessing your friend's marriage, you can with perfect propriety appear in pure white on that occasion.

IGNORAMUS.—"Siesta" is the name given to the practice indulged in by the Spaniards, and the inhabitants of hot climates generally, of sleeping two or three hours in the middle of the day, when the heat is too oppressive to admit of their going from home, or engaging in any kind of employment.

ALMA.—Molten the broken edges with the white of an egg, and then dust them over with finely-powdered lime. Bring the broken parts together at once and unite them carefully. The lime and eggs act directly, and if you will apply them properly, you will find it successful.

SAILOR'S LASS.—The hornpipe was composed for a wind instrument of the same name, and the name was also applied to the dance which may accompany it. Both the tune and the dance are of English invention, and are now frequently met with in the north-west of England, but the instrument is little used.

LADY'S MAID.—To raise the surface or pile of velvet when pressed down, warm a smoothing iron moderately, then cover it with a wet cloth and hold it under the velvet. The vapour arising from the heated cloth will raise the pile of the velvet with the assistance of a whale broom.

RIBA.—A few years ago fish was eaten off a fork, and a crust of bread took the place of a knife in removing it from the bones; then this fashion was dropped in favour of two forks; but at the present day fish knives and forks are as general that one seldom has to fall back on such makeshift arrangements.

AKATHON NORMAN.—Melt one ounce of gelatine in a wine-glassful of hot water, sweeten it when dissolved, and pour over it half a pint of port wine. Stir it well for ten minutes, strain through muslin, and pour into a wet basin or mould. It may be flavoured in any way the invalid likes, and about a dessert-spoonful may be taken at a time. If a less stimulating jelly is required half-water and half port wine may be used to make it.

META.—Hangnails generally come from a dry condition of the skin. They require constant treatment to be cured. Soak the fingers in warm water a few minutes every night, then cut away carefully the dry and loosened skin and apply rosemary or cold cream to nourish the tender skin. Leave it on during the night.

C. G. B.—Grease two or three plates with lard; set them where the creatures come; put a few flat sticks round the plates to encourage them to creep up. Now and again, when they are in good number on the lard, turn each plate over the kitchen fire, into which they will fall with the lard. Reset the plates, and in this way by perseverance you will get rid of them all.

KITCHEN MAID.—To clean a greasy stove while still hot take a piece of old rag, dip it in turpentine, and rub all over the greasy parts. This removes all grease, and if a drop or two of turpentine is added to the black lead before using, the stove will be quite easy to polish. If you once try this plan you will agree that it is excellent.

LEMO.—The fact to be ascertained is thus the law of the United States, and if that has made you a citizen of the States, you will need to make a declaration of nationality in order to have your nationality transferred back as you wish it; this can only be made before one of the principal Secretaries of State, but the information as to the American law may be got at the American Consulate, and may show that in terms of the Act you have never lost your nationality.

PASHA.—Enamelling is a process rather than a mixture; prepare the work by giving it a coat of glue-size and whitening; when dry, rub down with fine glass-paper until quite smooth; if soft wood, two coats may be given; then prepare the enamel by putting two ounces linseed oil into one pint boiling water; when dissolved, pour in two ounces fake white, and give the work a coat with a camel-hair brush or fine Turkey sponge, boiling hot; when dry rub down with pumice and felt rubber until perfectly smooth, next proceed to body up with white polish, using a little fake white on the rubber, then spirit of spar.

GREN.—Wash well in soap and water, and use a small, rather soft-haired brush, so as to clean, or get into without injury, the carvings, and while still wet with the soapy water, set it on a piece of white paper or cloth in full sunshine. Wet it two or three times a day for several days with the soapy water, and set it in the sun each time: then finally wash it well again, and it should recover its colour. Spirits of wine and whitening made into a paste are sometimes used in the same way, but the soapy water is best for fine work. You should look it over carefully to see there are no joinings, for if there are you must be extra careful about wetting it overmuch.

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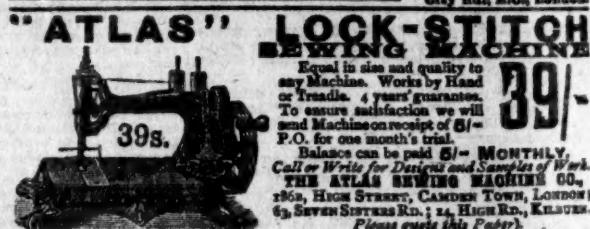
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